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THE GONZAGA—LORDS OF MANTUA



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MADONNA OF THE VICTORY

FROM THE PAINTING BY ANDREA MANTEGNA IN THE MUSÉE DU LOUVRE

THE GONZAGA— LORDS OF MANTUA

BY
SELWYN BRINTON, M.A., F.R.S.A.
BARRISTER-AT-LAW

WITH FORTY ILLUSTRATIONS

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TO LADY WARD

A LOVER OF MANTUA AND HER GREAT PRINCESS,
WHOSE UNFAILING SYMPATHY AND INSPIRING
ENTHUSIASM HAVE BEEN EVER BESIDE ME IN
THESE YEARS OF CREATION

L. Ward 2, 70

FOREWORD

THIS work may be said to date back as far as 1907, when I had been invited by my friend, Mr. E. A. Seemann of Leipzig—whose magnificent series of colour reproductions of the *Galleries of Europe*, in which he had claimed my help, was then coming through—to contribute a volume to his series of “Famous Art Cities” (*Berühmte Kunststätten*), then also being published. Mantua was my own choice, and one which I have never regretted ; for when the book appeared (1907) in German, richly illustrated, it had a very friendly reception from German critics and public.

The idea of an English edition had, very naturally, come into my mind, but had been rejected—mainly for two reasons. One was that, in talking over the book later at Mantua with Dr. Alessandro Luzio, then at the head of the Mantuan Archives—of whose profound knowledge of Mantuan story I wish here to express my appreciation and acknowledgment—in the course of a very friendly criticism he had suggested certain points which might be improved and strengthened, certain authorities, valuable in themselves and here made use of, on whom I had rested too exclusively. Yet another reason, even stronger to my mind, was the fact that I felt the real book to be written was one which, while treating Mantua—her churches, her palaces, her art, her story—as the background, should put in the first place the Gonzaga

themselves, that wonderful dynasty which for four centuries had made that city what she was, and kept her in the foreground of Italian political history.

But, when I came to revise my studies from this new point of view, I found what a subject lay before me. I found that Mantua, even apart from her great place in the movement of Humanism, in the art of the Renaissance, had really been under these Gonzaga, Lords of Mantua—this their title from first to last—the central pivot of north Italian history ; that she held her place, both in culture and political importance, beside Milan, Venice, Rome and even Florence ; that in writing this story of the Gonzaga I came near to writing that of Italy—if not of Europe. These pages which follow will, I believe, be found to fully justify this statement ; and what a wonderful romance of history then opened before me ! For I have tried here, while following closely the documented facts, to clothe those dry bones of History with something of their living reality. In so doing I have even sometimes seemed to myself to be present in the scenes I have pictured—on summer nights to have heard the music of the lute and girlish laughter when Isabella sat with Elisabetta Gonzaga in her “ Paradiso ” above the lakes of Mantua ; to have been beside her Lord Francesco in that press and fury of conflict on the banks of Taro ; to have seen her yet again, a queen and mother, among those terror-stricken fugitives in the Palazzo Colonna at Rome ; to have followed poor Crichton in that last midnight stroll beneath the dark arcaded streets of old Mantua ; or within the vast Reggia to have heard the whispered voices, the hurried steps of courtiers when Duke Vincenzo, last of his line, was nearing his end.

All this of the past : but there is no finality in history or

life. Last year, as, in completing these studies, I came out of the Biblioteca di Brera—and here I must express all my gratitude to its Director, Count Ricci, for his sympathy and assistance, and not less so to Professor Torelli, the present able Director of the Mantuan Archives—I saw upon the walls of Milan, beside that of the Duce himself, the name of Maurizio Gonzaga, Commander of the Italian National Militia ; and it gave me something that caught my breath—a rush of emotion, a welcome presage for the future—to see the grand old name, that seemed to have gone down two centuries before into ignominy and oblivion, come back to claim its place of leadership in this new Italy—which has kept the great message of the past, yet looks out with eager eyes into the future.

S. B.

July 1927

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THE GONZAGA— LORDS OF MANTUA

CHAPTER I

MANTUA IN THE WORLD OF LEGEND

IN the present work our attention will be mainly centred upon the fascinating and dramatic story of that great dynasty who, through three eventful centuries, so completely identified themselves with Mantua that the history of the old city, with her immemorial tradition, her culture, her immense resources and military power, had become one with their own—a story which is full of absorbing interest, and which has never yet, to my knowledge, been adequately treated in its entirety by any English writer. But before we come to that sudden and tragic change of dynasty which was to create this position, to make that story possible, it seems to me entirely necessary to precede this by sketching out, however briefly, the earlier, half legendary past of Mantua, her awakening to new life as a free Republic, and then her enslavement under the tyranny of the Bonacolsi, themselves to fall in their turn before a stronger power.

In all this old soil of Europe we strike our roots—perhaps unconsciously, yet very deep—into the ages that have gone before. Mantua, most of all, throws back into a world of myth and legend, and traces in the pages of her old chronicler, Stefano Gionta,¹ the city's first beginnings to Manto, the mythic prophetess—"Fatidica Manto"—herself the daughter of the blind seer Tiresias, who, escaping to these marshy

¹ *Il Fioretto delle Chroniche di Mantova.* Raccolto da Stefano Gionta, ed ampliato fine al presente anno MDCCXLI. In Mantua. Stampatori Archiducali.

plains of Northern Italy with her followers and treasure, became mother by the river-god of Ocnus, King of the Tuscans, mentioned by Virgil in his *Æneid* (Lib. x. v. 198) among the Tuscan allies of his hero, the pious Æneas :

“ Fatidicæ Mantus et Tusci filius amnis,
Qui muros matrisque dedit tibi, Mantua, nomen.”

Here, however, Mario Equicola, the famous Humanist of the Court of Isabella d'Este, in his history of Mantua dedicated to her son, Duke Federigo,¹ comes to our aid with his own comment on this story, as a truth hidden in poetic garb—“ seeing that it is a custom of the poets to cover the naked truth with some sort of veil. Hence, because Ocnus was a Tuscan, Virgil said he was son of the Tuscan stream ; because skilled in the art of divination, he made him son of the prophetic Manto, since the Greeks called this art of divination *Manteia*, the which knowledge was peculiar to Tuscany, as Tullius and Lucan affirm.” The Mantuan scholar then goes on to comment, with some acerbity, on the lines of another poet, Dante, where he tells us that

“ Quivi passando la Vergine cruda
Vidde terra nel mezzo del pantano,”

exclaiming here indignantly : “ Dante calls Manto a virgin, Virgil a mother ; but to me it seems madness to suppose that she ever was a real woman at all, who came with her followers into a remote marsh far from all human converse ” ; nor is he less critical of Boccaccio who, as he tells us, had given Manto yet another son, Citeonius.

We leave this rank growth of legend, and reach more certain ground in assuming that the ancient Etruscan race—the “ Toscani ” of our Mantuan chronicler—held sway in and around Mantua, leaving there traces of their power, their culture and religious observance ; that they were dispossessed by the invading Gauls, and that later, most certainly, the city—said by Equicola to have been founded three hundred years

¹ Vide *Dell' Istoria di Mantova*. Libri cinque. Scritta in commentari da Mario Equicola. Dedicated “ al Sereniss. Signore, Il Sig. Duca di Mantova e Monferrato, etc. In Mantova. M.D.C.X.” I am happy in possessing a copy of this date—the second edition (seconda impressione), by Francesco Osanna, the Ducal printer, acquired by me in Mantua in 1905.

before Rome was built, by Aliprandi five hundred, by Stefano Gionta in his *Fioretto* more than six hundred—became definitely subject to the advancing Roman power.

When Octavius Cæsar came into power at Rome, and had to face the pressing problem of finding lands after Philippi for the veterans of his legions, certain Mantuan lands, as well as those of Cremona and other cities, seem to have been appropriated by himself and Marcus Antonius for this purpose. Virgil, the young Mantuan poet, had been one of the sufferers, but through the intercession of the Prefect Asinius Pollio, had his lands restored to him by Octavius; and in his *Eclogues* expresses his gratitude to his benefactor and future patron, in the lines :

“ O Melibæe, deus nobis haec otia fecit,
Namque erit ille mihi semper deus.”

And Virgil, through all the vicissitudes of Mantuan story, remained always a mythic, almost divinized, tradition in the old city, proud above all things of having given birth to the great Augustan poet: his birthplace revealed in the line commencing with the words “ Mantua me genuit,” nor yet forgotten later by Dante, when he claimed him for his guide in the terrible journey. His figure, seated with a book before him, was set upon the Palazzo del Podestà, erected by the Commune within the Piazza Broletto in 1277, in memory, says the story (how characteristic of those fierce mediæval feuds!) of victory over Cremona. Perhaps it was this veneration, savouring too much of idolatry, which had led (as I shall come to tell later) Carlo Malatesta, uncle of the young Prince Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, to tear down that yet more ancient statue of the poet in the piazza—which it had been “ the custom of the Mantuans to crown every year with flowers, and to dance and to hold jousts around it ”—and to throw it into the Mincio; a piece of vandalism for which he has been roundly and, if true, not unjustly cursed by subsequent scholars and historians. It was to Pietole, Virgil’s traditional birthplace, that the great scholar and Humanist, Vittorino da Feltre, was wont to bring his pupils from the Casa Zojosa at Mantua—where the young Gonzaga princes were being educated in the “ Literæ Humaniores ”—to spend the hot days of summer; and centuries later

the French invaders, under Buonaparte, acknowledged the claim of the Mantuan poet's memory by exempting this little town from taxation, and, still more practically, by creating at Mantua herself the noble Piazza Virgiliana from a swampy piece of ground from within the city walls.

In the days of Isabella d'Este there had come forward the idea of some worthier monument to the Mantuan poet within his own city ; and the correspondence still exists between that cultured Princess and the Humanist Pontanus, who gives it as his judgment that " the statue should stand by itself, with a laurel crown upon the head, and the drapery be either an antique toga caught upon the shoulder, or a senator's robe—whichever Messer Andrea may prefer." The Messer Andrea here referred to was, of course, the great Andrea Mantegna, court painter at that very time to the Gonzaga. No commission could have been more welcome, we may imagine, to his own sympathies than this design ; and, in fact, his drawing for the proposed monument is preserved within the Louvre collection, very much as Pontanus had suggested—a monument which in the troubled days to come never materialized further ; but had it done so might have been one of the most precious treasures left us by the Renaissance.

Thus the memory of her great Latin poet diffuses itself, with a faint fragrance of the past, through all the story of the old city, through the troublous times of her mediæval Commune, through that splendid Renaissance Court of Francesco Gonzaga and Isabella d'Este, down to the French occupation under Buonaparte, and even to the last century, when the little Commune of Pietole changed its name to Villa Virgiliana, and erected a statue to the poet, the work of the Mantuan sculptor Paganini ; and I may add here that the noble bust of Virgil, which was formerly preserved in the Museo Greco-Romano of Mantua, has now found a worthy home within the Reggia. But in the later Roman days, when the great waves of Barbarian invasion descended upon the decrepit Roman Empire, Mantua received her full share of loss and suffering. I have shown elsewhere ¹ that this was almost

¹ *Vide* Selwyn Brinton, *Berühmte Kunststätten*, No. 37, " Mantua " (Verlag von E. A. Seemann. Leipzig, 1907).

inevitable, from the extraordinary natural position of the city. If we glance at a map of North Italy we shall see Mantua lying to the south of Verona and Villafranca, to the north of the great estuary of the Po, with which her own river connects her, almost equidistant from Brescia, Cremona, Parma, Reggio and (a little farther) Modena and Ferrara, all cities of importance in the old time. Still more does Mantua lie in a position of great natural strength, upon the plain traversed by the smoothly flowing Mincio :

“ Propter aquam, tardis ingens ubi flexibus errat Mincius . . . ”

with her three great lakes, the Lago Superiore, Mezzo, and Inferiore, flanking her on three sides to secure her from attack—though tending to make her climate malarious. Hence the city was always, and in fact still is (as was shown in the late war), a stronghold of the greatest importance ; and from a military point of view might, as I imagine, be considered as the key of Northern Italy. This fact must be kept in view through all her later history ; and hence she has had always to bear the brunt of foreign invasion—from Gaul and Goth, Greek, Hun and Lombard, to mediæval German Emperors and later French and Austrians.

In those dark and terrible days, which saw the break-up of the Roman Imperial system, wave after wave of barbarism must have descended upon the devoted city. First the Goths, coming southward from Slavonia and Hungary, made her one of their chief strongholds, for that purpose holding a strong place on the Mincio, which may have derived from this its name of Goito. “ After these last,” says Equicola, “ attracted or drawn thither by the sweetness of the prey, came the Vandals, a Germanic race with whom were united the Alani and the Suevi, who also despoiled miserably Mantua. Yet further was unhappy Italy exposed to the onset of the Huns, whose king—in the year 445 from when the Virgin bore us her Son—was Attila, the scourge of God (*flagello di Dio*), who carried fire and sword through many lands of Lombardy, among which were those of Aquileia, Padua, Vicenza, Verona, Milan, Pavia, and perhaps also Bergamo.” This writer goes on to relate the legend that Pope Leo, leaving Rome at the

prayer of the Emperor Valentinian, and going forth to meet the terrible Hun “in the territory of Mantua, where the Mincio enters the Po, induced him to return into Pannonia; and it is a pious thing” (he adds discreetly) “to believe that the cause of this return was the authority of the Holy Pontiff, and that he” (Attila) “saw SS. Peter and Paul menacing him above the head of the aforesaid Leo.”

In the century following, when the Eastern Empire may have recovered through the Exarchate of Ravenna some hold upon Mantua, we only get from Equicola, who is generally clear in his statement, an impression of general and confused fighting between Vandals, Longobardi, Greeks, Franks, Burgundians and Ostrogoths, with Mantua as a convenient base or centre for hostilities—an impression which is probably not far from the melancholy truth. The reader who seeks for fuller details on this period will perhaps find them best in such a monumental work as that of Procopius,¹ who had his information at first hand; and I shall turn now to the later period when Mantua at length emerges from these dark ages as an individual and self-dependent Commune—the Roman tradition of municipal freedom reasserting itself here, as in Milan, Florence and other Republics, against the foreign feudal invader—and showing her new-found power in the war with Cremona, which lasted for years (Gionta says two years, Equicola five), the cause of the quarrel being the possession of the river Oglio, but from which she emerged victorious.²

Here we first get into touch with the actual city of Mantua that we know—which we can trace in her records, and very soon begin to find in her existing buildings. The Western Empire is now becoming emergent, with Charlemagne as its

¹ See *Procopii Cæsariensis de Rebus Gothorum ac Vandalorum*, Lib. vii. Basileæ MDXXXI. Procopius is described by Gibbon (*Decline and Fall*, ch. xl.) as the bitter enemy of the Empress Theodora, the amatory excesses of whose earlier career he chronicled unmercifully. It may be permitted to the writer to own the pride of a Bibliophile in possessing an early and complete edition of this work, a noble piece of printing, published at Basel in 1531, and acquired by him at Mantua.

² The Mantuan chronicler, relating the terms of peace, adds that Cremona, besides losing the river on both banks, had to build the Torre della Predella with material from her own lands and water from the disputed river. This last fine touch of scorn is, however, disputed by Platina.

creator ;¹ and at this very period (*circa* A.D. 804) that most precious relic of the city through her history, the “ *Preziosissimo Sangue* ” (the very blood from Christ’s own side) is honoured by Pope Leo by his personal adoration and his pontifical brief, and the Oratory of S. Andrea takes its origin.

The story of this precious relic, as given by Gionta, is that “ in the reign of Tiberius, being the third year after Jesus Christ’s death, that same Longinus came to the city (of Mantua) who once had pierced the Saviour’s side. When he struck the Saviour’s side, the blood and water which issued thence, flowing down the lance, reached the hand of Longinus ; and, rubbing his eyes with this same hand, he became suddenly illuminated, and taking the jar of vinegar which he had placed there to give Jesus a drink, he collected in it some part of the blood, and went on his way.” The chronicler goes on to say that, having been baptized and going forth to preach the faith of Christ, he came at length to Mantua, “ lodging in an alms-house (*uno Spedale*) on that very spot where now is to be seen the Church of S. Andrea ; and, because the land was full of pagans, he buried in the orchard of the alms-house that vessel where was the Precious Blood, and then went forth again to exhort the people to worship Jesus Christ.” Here follows the account of his martyrdom by the Roman Governor, and his burial by night by the Christians ; and of how “ many hundred years later, when that same body of Longinus was found, the alms-house bell began of itself to toll.”

I give this legend as told in the *Fioretto* because of its own interest, and of its real importance as affecting the story of Mantua. Again and again through the ages—as may be traced in these succeeding pages—we shall find the miracle of the Most Precious Blood recalled ; and the old city turning in her hour of agony, amid the horrors of plague or war, to this wondrous relic in her midst. Over its first hiding-place in later years was to rise that wonderful Renaissance Basilica of S. Andrea, designed with something of Roman grandeur by the master mind of Leo Battista Alberti, and which yet holds in her crypt beneath the High Altar, within vessels of gold,

¹ His successor, Charles the Bald, is said later to have died in Mantua of poison (*in Mantua di veleno fu morto*).

that "Preziosissimo Sangue"—the Most Precious Blood of Jesus—before whose altar at every dawn throughout the year solemn Mass is said. I have knelt there in the dawn of an early summer morning amid a little group of worshippers, veiled women mostly, members, as I thought, of some pious confraternity—a memory never to be forgotten. The world seemed far away then: in the shadowy quiet the mystery of adoring faith came very near.

For in that dim mysterious light of the subterranean chapel, which the great architect Viani had designed for the Gonzaga Princes in 1600, before the double altar, where the figures of Faith and Hope watch over the two vases of the Precious Blood, the tears, the prayers, and aspirations of past ages seem yet to linger with their haunting presence. Nor can this intense impression, to my mind, be in any way dispelled by the improbabilities—even impossibilities—of a legend which relates how, when the Huns again (Gionta gives the date of 921) besieged, and perhaps may have captured, the city, the Precious Blood was again hidden (this time with the sacred sponge and the body of Longinus himself among the relics) within the garden of the alms-house of S. Andrea; how in the century following it was again recovered, through a dream or vision in which S. Andrea himself appeared to a certain Adalberto; how the dream being related to Countess Beatrice, whose father-in-law had founded the monastery of S. Andrea, and the Most Precious Blood being revealed by the shaking of the soil near, it was rediscovered, and brought with great ceremony within the monastery itself.

This Countess Beatrice was the widow of Count Bonifazio, the son of Tebaldo, Count of Canossa, who had received Mantua and Modena in fief from the Emperor Otho II. Herself a daughter of the Emperor, Beatrice was succeeded as ruler of Mantua by her own daughter, the famous Countess Matilda. With the last invasion of the Huns the wave of Barbarian onset into Italy had spent itself; at the turn of the year, 1000 from Christ's birth, the new order of things is becoming apparent. The free Italian Communes are shaping themselves into splendid independent political existence, beneath the shadow of the two dominant factors for the future in Italian policy—

the Holy Roman Empire, expressing itself by the Elective Empire in Germany, and the power of the Mediæval Church, centred in the Papacy at Rome—two forces soon to be locked in deadly and fratricidal conflict. At this point it is that we leave the Mantua of legend for the Mantua of record and actual history.

CHAPTER II

MANTUA AS A MEDIÆVAL REPUBLIC

THE figure of the great Countess Matilda of Canossa is one of first importance in the story of Mantua, as in that of Italy, and indeed of Christendom. It might not be too much to say that without her consistent and devoted support of the Church, her vast possessions and influence throughout Northern Italy, and her ability and strength of character, the terrible duel between Pope and Emperor—which culminated in the latter's abject surrender and humiliation at Canossa—might have had a very different ending. The fact of the strategic importance of Mantua, which I have described in the last chapter, is borne out by the evident anxiety of both the contending parties to obtain and keep control of the city. Matilda, in her Charter of Rights to the city, as given by the old chronicler, uses fair and gracious words: "In the name of GOD and of the Holy and Indivisible TRINITY; Guelph by the grace of GOD, Duke and Marquis, Matilda, if somewhat she be, is so by the grace of GOD. It lies in the scope of our power to add honours and advantages to all our faithful followers; wherefore be it known to all subjects of the Church and of ourselves that our most faithful citizens of Mantua have demanded to be relieved of certain grievances, and to have restored certain things taken from them by our predecessors. Wherefore WE, for the memorable fidelity and service of the aforesaid City, do relieve it of all these exactions and wrongs, nor permit any to renew them. . . . WE will moreover that our heirs shall maintain these favours. . . . Given at Mantua under OUR seal and signature the fifth day before the calends of July, the year of the Lord's Incarnation 1090."

But when in the year following (1091) the Emperor Henry III, after eleven months of siege, had gained possession of the city, he issues his own charter, in language no less picturesque and terms no less gracious: "In the Name of the Holy and Indivisible TRINITY, Henry III by the divine clemency Emperor of the Romans, Augustus. The grace of the Spirit breathes where it wills. To Us it is befitting with just measure to weigh the merits of the faithful, instructing them in justice, of the which WE are the defenders, so that, as the wheat from the chaff, even so WE may separate the faithful from the faithless, and friends from enemies; just as the Apostle tells us that the King bears the sword to the praise of the good and the punishment of ill-doers. Knowing therefore the fidelity of our Mantuans, WE remove all the exactions and wrongs . . ."; and the rest of this chapter confirms the privileges already obtained from Matilda.¹

It may be questioned, however, whether the Commune of Mantua was not playing off both these illustrious combatants each against the other, with the view of getting the best terms available for themselves; for we find that Countess Matilda, having recovered her possessions from the Emperor Henry IV while he was in Germany, found Mantua "reduced (*ridotta*) to a state of freedom, not only defending herself, but inflicting harm on her enemies," and persistently declining to let Matilda resume her lordship—so that the Countess, "seeing that she could gain it in no other way, invested it both by land and water, holding it closely besieged." The peacemaker here seems to have been the Bishop of the city, Manfred by name, "who, seeing his city bereft of every aid, exhorted the Mantuans to send spokesmen to confer with the Countess." Even then, we are told, "it was the discords within the city itself more than any other cause which led to this proposal being accepted."

¹ Both these remarkable documents are quoted at some length by Mario Equicola in his *Commentari Mantovani* (Lib. i.), and merit more detailed study than I can afford here, both for their dignified and beautiful language and for the light they throw on the time-spirit. For they make it clear that both sides in this great historic conflict (not excluding the Emperor Henry III) considered themselves as divinely appointed agents in the world.

But Matilda, a great and wise figure in history, gave the spokesman fair hearing, and to the rebellious city just and honourable terms ; and so brought it back to her rule, on the last day of October in 1114, after it had been a free city for twenty-four years.

“ This is that Matilda,” writes Equicola, “ who warred fearlessly with Emperors for the Church ; who built hospitals, churches, bridges, towers, surrounded strong places with walls, and was ever favourable to the side of the Church and to the Pope. She died in the year of our Redemption, in 1115, in the sixty-ninth year of her age ”—and with her passed away a great figure from Italy and the world’s history. Matilda left by will the Church as heir to her vast possessions ; “ the which will was a fruitful source of discord between Popes and Emperors ; but Mantua finally became a fief of the Empire, under the power of Henry IV.”

In these last years of her strenuous life—which had ended in the year following her recovery of Mantua—when her health was already failing, the pious Countess showed much favour to a great monastic foundation, the famous Cenobbio of S. Benedetto in Polirone, so called from its position between the rivers Po and Lirone. Founded by her grandfather, Count Tebaldo di Canossa (about 1003), who had also been the pious founder of the monastery of S. Andrea in Mantua, the Cenobbio had been immensely enriched by the Countess Matilda. Here it was that she had spent her last days, and before her death disposed in favour of this monastery of all her possessions in Mantuan territory (*beni nel Mantovano*), proclaiming them independent of any power whatever. The document containing this important concession bears her wonted form of signature—that self-humiliation before the power of God which we have seen already in her charter to Mantua :

MA	TIL
DA	DEI
GRATIA	SI
QUID	ES

. . . and here in the Cenobbio she actually died, and was

buried in the monastery by her own express desire.¹ The monastery suffered terribly later in the disastrous time of the sack of Mantua and the years following (1632-50). Though in the old days, after Matilda's death, four thousand poor had received daily food at the monastery doors, the Abbot had now to forbid all alms from lack of means—" *stando nostra estrema necessità* "; and to raise money he secretly sold that precious relic, the body of Countess Matilda, to Pope Urban VIII, who wished to put up a monument to her in Rome. This was in the end of April 1634, and this underhand transaction, when it became known, raised a storm of resistance and protest in the Mantovano; but the Pope, having secured the treasured relic, would not give it back.²

But what is of very special interest to the subject of this work was the intimate connection of the Corradi di Gonzaga with this ancient Monastery of S. Benedetto of Polirone. Dr. Luzio, in his interesting study of this subject,³ has shown that, before becoming Lords of Mantua, the Gonzaga were known as Corradi; and further that the Gonzaga rose to power under the shelter of this great monastic foundation, whose vassals they long remained, holding (says the document of 1196) their possessions in fief to the monastery, " *possessiones . . . in beneficium feudi—videlicet braida monasterii Gonzagie adjacentem cum burgo in eo posito et aliis possessionibus monasterii in Gonzaga.* " ⁴

I shall refer to this important point in my next chapter,

¹ Fra Salimbene, among the four great Benedictine foundations of his time (A.D. 1248), includes this " *monasterium Sancti Benedicti inter Padum et Larionem, in quo Comitissa Mathildis in arta saxeā sepulta quiescit.* " The first of these four is, of course, Monte Cassino—" *quod caput ordinis est.* " See *Cronica Fratris Salimbene ordinis Minorum*. This fascinating chronicle was presented to me in Florence by that fine scholar, the late Rev. James Wood Brown.

² See *Il Monastero di S. Benedetto in Polirone*, by R. Berodi (Mantua, 1905). The monument in S. Pietro at Romé was entrusted (1635) to the genius of Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Within a niche, upon a plain pedestal, is the queenly figure of the great Countess.

³ Vide A. Luzio, *I Corradi di Gonzaga Signori di Mantua* (Milan, 1913).

⁴ The Walterus mentioned in connection with this feudal grant (A.D. 1196) seems to have been Gualtierio de Gonzaga, who was in Palestine in 1221, but returned safely home. The Casaloldi, as we shall see later, also claimed these fiefs, held from the monks " *a privilegio Communis Mantue.* "

in connection with the Bonacolsi despotism, and now return to the brief and chequered story of Mantua as a free city. Claimed by both sides, as we have seen, in the tremendous duel between Church and Empire, of priceless value to either from her unique strategic position, yet penetrated deeply by the new breath of civic freedom—that ancient heritage of the Roman municipium—which swept through the Republics of North Italy in this age, Mantua grasped what freedom she could during the struggle of Guelph and Ghibelline. For the Empire had never given up its claim to suzerainty, as we shall find later through all the story of Mantua. Under Henry IV the city seems to have returned to her old position as an Imperial fief; but this Emperor, perhaps feeling his title or position insecure, treated the Mantuans liberally, exhorting them to “persevere in their faithfulness to Cæsar,” and removing many exactions in his Charter (*privilegio*) of 1116, which was confirmed by his successors in the Empire, Lothar and Conrad (1137). Even the great Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, in spite (or perhaps by reason) of his bitter quarrel with the Lombard Republics, treated the Mantuans with marked favour, confirming the earlier Charters of Matilda and Lothar, and expressing the desire that his palace should be erected near the Church of S. Ruffino; and still more important is his Charter to Mantua of 1159, in which—“considering the constancy and fidelity concerning the honour of the Empire and his own, and the devoted love of his most faithful Mantuans”—he exempts them from his expedition against the Veronese, Venetians, Paduans and Vicentines, and “promises to confirm the honour, estate, and good customs of that City with the possessions which she held before his coming into Italy.”

Thus we find that the Mantuans, who had played off Matilda against the Emperor with success, kept and improved this position during the contest of Barbarossa with the Republics, and after his death in 1190, under the short and broken reigns of Henry V and Otho; until the accession of Frederick II brought back the quarrel between Pope and Emperor into the acutest form. Through these troubled times, and yet later, the Mantuans were prudently improving their position at home and abroad, and commenced that Ponte de' Molini

“where are verses¹ written in 1190, which were made by Raimondo the Scrivener. They built also at the same time Borgoforte and commenced the Serraglio.”

This Ponte de' Molini, or Bridge of Mills, was the pride of the city through all her later history, and was certainly a unique construction. We reach it in about fifteen minutes' walk from the Reggia, passing through the later Piazza Virgiliana, and find it beyond the Porta Mulina. It consists of a covered gallery, measuring some 200 metres, and was intended to serve the double purpose of defending the city and of separating the waters of the Lago Superiore from the Lago Inferiore—or, more exactly speaking, from the Lago di Mezzo, since the Ponte S. Giorgio forms another division of the Lakes. Thus it serves the purpose of a gigantic dam, through which the water descends, turning at the same time the twelve mill-wheels. Above each one of these is a statue of one of the twelve Apostles, the central niche being occupied by Our Saviour; and considering the date of its construction, it is a most remarkable work, which, surviving the ravages of war, carries us back to those early days of the Mantuan Commune. “It was then too that was built a Palace with Loggie, in the which was a great tower, for the reason that it was then the custom for the nobles to have towers, as it was a sign of nobility.”

Thus we see that some of the most distinctive architectural features of Mantua which still survive date from this period of her independence, when, beneath the nominal suzerainty of the Emperors, she developed her individual character and her power. This Palazzo del Podestà, and the Torre del Commune near it, still survive in the Piazza del Broletto. Borgoforte was a strong place to the south of Mantua, near the junction of the Po and Oglio rivers, where the line to Modena now crosses the river; and both this and the Serraglio come often into Mantuan story, when Bonacolsi or Gonzaghi have to defend their frontier from the invader. From the city of Reggio the Mantuan Commune now acquired the strong place of Gonzaga,

¹ The tenor of these verses is that nine Rectors and three Procurators, holding rule in the city of Virgil, caused to be constructed twelve mills (*molini*) with a bridge, and that Alberto Pittentino was the architect.

which was later the site for a famous palace of the Gonzaghi, built in 1468. "To the north, against the Veronese, the Commune built Castiglione Mantovano, and to resist Ostiglia remade Serrevalle, and next enlarged Gazolo, and the streets of Mantua were paved."

All these moves were intended to strengthen the frontier, and point to a firm foreign policy without ; yet at the same time we trace symptoms of discontent within. "There were at this time many noble families in the city, among which are found the names of the Agnelli, Casaloldi, Avogadori and Poltroni ; and in the documents of this period there is mention of a certain Filippo Gonzaga being sent as ambassador. But now the Avogadori and the Poltroni were banished, for the reason that they had conspired to bring about the death of the Bishop of the city, which they had effected within the Monastery of S. Andrea in May of 1235." ¹

At the same time the quiet and freedom of Mantua "was disturbed by the return from Germany of Frederick II"—through fear of whom Mantua, Treviso, Padua, Vicenza, and Verona joined in confederation against Ezzelino Romano, "from whose council and will the Emperor could never depart." The characters which now come before us are of such interest—of themselves, and in their influence on the history of Mantua—that they claim here our special attention. Frederick II himself was one of the greatest of the Emperors, and one of the most remarkable figures of his own or any time. Born at Jesi in the Marches in 1194, an Italian in his sympathies and character, while he drew from the Suabian princes of his house their military valour, and on his mother's side, from Robert Guiscard the Norman, his political astuteness and the craft of a "rusé Normand," his long minority under the authority of Rome had given the cities of Northern Italy time to consolidate their independence, to become real Republics. The Guelph party had become again powerful in Lombardy, and the Republics of Milan, Bologna, Brescia,

¹ *Vide* Mario Equicola, *op. cit.* Lib. i. It must be noted here that the Casaloldi laid claims to the Castello of Gonzaga, but were deprived of these lands by Frederick II in his "privilegio" of A.D. 1220 ; and Gonzaga coming under the testament (*essendo delle ragione*) of Countess Matilda, was handed over to two "capellani" (chaplains) in the name of the Church.

Faenza, Mantua, Turin, Alessandria, Lodi, Padua, Vicenza, and Treviso assembled their Council in the Mantuan territory in 1226, and renewed the ancient League of Lombardy; while the power of the Papacy, then at its height under Innocent III, was not averse to the liberties of the people, provided the authority of Holy Church was respected. It was this Pope who had founded the two great preaching orders of the Franciscans and the Dominicans—the latter charged especially to combat heresies, such as that of the Paterini, within and without Italy; and it was from his successor, Honorius III, that Frederick had received the crown of the Empire, when in 1220 he came into Italy.

The Emperor now established himself in Sicily, defeating the Saracens, who had remained in possession of the central part of the island,¹ and building castles in the important points of Sicily and Apulia, which he held secure by a faithful guard. Some of these still remain, the Sicilian art blended with the French Gothic into forms of most graceful beauty; and the Castello di Maniace guarding the harbour of Syracuse is a typical example. Here the spacious hall with its vaulted bays is French in conception, while the marbles—of rose colour, black, white and silvery grey—indicate the southern love of colour, and the grotesque beasts suggest Lombard influence; and this Emperor must have repaired and beautified the semi-oriental “palace, with its hanging gardens and Lion court, its airy loggie and golden halls, endeared to him as the home of his childhood”; while he was busy elsewhere on great buildings in the Castel di Monte, Lucera, Foggia, and Capua.²

¹ The Saracens, though conquered by the Normans under Roger (1060–90), were still in revolt, many of them occupying the mountains in the centre of Sicily, pillaging the country, and getting frequent reinforcements from Africa. Frederick II attacked and conquered them; and then offered them new and fertile lands in Italy, on condition they should swear allegiance and serve in his armies. Many thousands accepted these terms; and he carried them off to Apulia, and gave them the city of Lucera, with the rich plains of the Capitanate, this colony giving him twenty thousand soldiers. Twenty-five years later he induced the rest to accept similar conditions, and established them between Naples and Salerno in the city of Nocera—still called Nocera of the Pagans (*vide* Sismondi, vol. ii.).

² *Vide* Cecilia Waeren, *Mediæval Sicily*, ch. xi. Sismondi (*Républiques Italiennes*) mentions his Castle of Capuana in the midst of Naples as a monument of this Emperor's magnificence.

Meanwhile around him, in his south Italian home, he gathered a cultured Court, inspired by his own love of letters. He had founded the University of Naples, and given to it special privileges. A man of extraordinary mental powers, he cultivated philosophy and letters with enthusiastic interest, and himself (we are told) spoke with equal facility Latin, Italian, German, French, Greek, and Arabic. His biographer, Niccola di Jansilla,¹ tells that this Emperor was passionately fond of philosophy; that he cultivated it for himself, and spread its study through his States; and that "he himself gave a proof of his literary talents, which he directed especially towards natural history, in writing a book on the nature and care of birds, which shows us what progress he had made in philosophy." It is scarcely too much to say that it was in this cultured Court that the Italian tongue, the "Lingua volgare" (as says Villani) of the time became the "Lingua Cortegiana," the language of the Court, and began to form itself for the first time as a language. It was at this epoch (writes Sismondi) that the first Sicilian poets prepared by their verses and songs (*rhymes et chansons*) the language of which Dante was soon to make such noble use. From his youth up Frederick II had encouraged them. He was a poet himself, and his children, his ministers (such as Piero delle Vigne), and all the distinguished men of his Court professed the same love of poetry, and encouraged it by their example and their bounty.²

It was the age of Troubadours (*Trovatori*); and I have special reason to mention them, for one of the most famous is connected with Mantua. Enveloped in mystery, the romantic figure of Sordello traverses the pages of her story at this very time as soldier, as singer, as lover, and as patriot.

¹ Vide Niccolai di Jansilla, *Istoria Conradi et Manfredi*. In proemio, T. viii. p. 495.

² In this Sicilian Court of Frederick II, in the beautiful palace I have described, even the Arab poets found appreciation and welcome. Very characteristic is the story that, when the monarch came to Jerusalem, he missed the evening Call to Prayer, and questioned the Cadi, saying he had spent the night there expressly to hear in it the Muslim laudations. This, as Cecilia Waeren remarks, is the mental attitude of an intelligent modern tourist, but hardly that of a mediæval Crusader.

We know of him, at least, with certainty that he was a “trovatore”—a famous poet, whose verses have survived; that he was Mantuan born, from Goito in the Mantovano (*vide* ch. i.); that he was in the service of the Count of San Bonifacio, then to some extent over-lord of Mantua (and whose wife he is even said, among his many legendary adventures, to have carried off), and that he is mentioned by Dante, with profound veneration, as a Mantuan patriot, among the shadowy spirits of his Purgatorio.

At this time the Provençal language had a strong hold on Italy. It was freely used by the poets and “trovatori,” even in preference to Italian, then still in its infancy; and a poem by Sordello himself in this language, in which he defends his love of the beautiful Countess (*la pros Contessa*) lies before me as I write,¹ where the whole poem is given in Provençal, with an Italian translation, as “Tensa di Sordel” and “de Peire Guilhelm.” These “tense” (*tensons*) were duologues in verse between rival “trovatori” in the Courts of Love, which were in those days held before their elected Queen.

What comes to us, indeed, with something of a shock in these verses of Sordello—apart from his charming love songs—is their note of materialism, their almost Epicurean view of life, of its duties and pleasures. When Charles of Anjou would call him to the Crusades: “My Lord Count, by what right do you exact from me that I should go to seek for death? . . . I am in no such hurry to seek salvation. I will arrive at eternal life as late as possible.” Or again, when Bertrand d’Alamand calls him to the wars: “. . . Go you to overthrow castles and their walls, while I am receiving a sweet kiss from my beloved one”; or yet again, to the prudent council of Piero Guiglielmo: “I will enjoy the good of love, and bear its ills.”

“Peyre Guilhelm ieu say iausir
Los besrd’ amor, el mals suffir.”

Yet if this seems scarcely the note of chivalry and romance which we might expect from the Mantuan patriot, the troubadour knight, the companion of Dante’s journey, it finds

¹ *Vide* Equicola, *op. cit.* Lib. i. This Contessa was probably the beautiful Guida di Rodez (see Chapter III.).

exactly its place in that Court of the second Frederick which Sordello may have known intimately, and by which he must certainly have been influenced. For both contemporaries and writers in the age following bear witness to the freedom of this Emperor's conduct and opinions.

The great Florentine historian Villani, in the age succeeding, after praising Frederick's military talents and extraordinary abilities, goes on to add—"but he was dissolute in the search of pleasure. He had a great number of concubines, after the custom of the Saracens: he gave himself up to the pleasure of the senses, and led an Epicurean life, considering there was no life to follow this one. This was the chief reason why he became the enemy of Holy Church."¹ And Frate Salimbene, a contemporary who had known him personally, tells us the same story. "For he was a Epicurean (*erat enim Epicureus*), and whatever he could find in Divine Scripture for himself and his wise men to show there was no life after death that he fully laid hold of."²

But it was just this attitude of easy tolerance, of cultured scepticism—this in the very age of the Crusades, of the persecutions of the Cathari and Albigenses—which roused the Papal fury, insistent on its vengeance till this whole House of the Hohenstaufen should be destroyed from off the earth. It was a time of marvellous spiritual awakening—even amid all the ferocity of mediæval age and manners—when through all Europe the monks of St. Francis had gone forth to preach his message of love, of the Christ life renewed on earth. At this very time the Lombard cities, under the spell of one man's eloquence, met on the plain of Paquara—their numbers reckoned at 400,000 persons—all the citizens of Vicenza, Mantua, Padua, Brescia, and from Verona, Ferrara, Reggio, Bologna, Parma. Standing on a lofty pulpit the preacher,

¹ *Vide* Giovanni Villani, Lib. vi. ch. i.

² Cf. *Chronica Fratris Salimbene*, A.D. 1250. As a churchman the good Frate condemns him, but gives a wonderful picture of the man, and has to admit the influence of his personal charm. "*De fide Dei nichil habebat. Callidus homo fuit, avarus, luxuriosus, malitiosus, iracundus. Et valens homo interdum . . . jocundus, deliciosus, industrius; pulcher homo et bene formatus, sed medie stature. Vidi enim eum, et aliquando dilexi.*" "I have seen him, and sometimes I loved him"—what an admission for the monk of St. Francis!

John of Vicenza, gave as his text the words : " I give you my peace. My peace I leave with you." He depicted to his audience the useless, cruel, ghastly horrors of feudal war. He showed the Spirit of Christ as the Spirit of Peace ; in the name of God and the Church he bade these Lombards lay aside their age-long hatreds, and accept the treaty of universal peace. He carried all before him by his marvellous eloquence ; but the powers of strife only too soon resumed their sway.

This was in August of 1233 ; and in 1236 Frederick II had come south into Italy by the Trento valley, and entered Verona with 3000 German soldiers, being joined later by 10,000 Saracens. Vicenza was captured by his lieutenant, Ezzelino Romano, and barbarously pillaged ; and the year following the Imperial forces were in the Mantovano, had burnt Gazzolo and reached Goito, within striking distance of the capital. But Frederick was far too able a ruler to proceed to extremities in the case of a city which in past ages had been devoted to his House. He wished not to destroy, but to bring the great cities to his side ; and in his Charter (*privilegio*) with Mantua he confirms the concessions of earlier Emperors—" seeing that the noble take their noblest vengeance when they pardon . . . the Mantuans having done Us great and venerable service, although later seduced from that devotion by malignant and fraudulent councils . . . and because truth and mercy look to the King ; We therefore remit every injury that the said Mantuans may have done, confirming to them all the privileges of our ancestors," etc.¹

Then passing on with his army beyond the Oglio, he cut off the retreat of the Milanese from their own city, and inflicted on them a crushing defeat (27th November, 1237) at Cortenuova, in which their " carroccio " was captured, the flower of the Guelph army destroyed, and only a remnant—through the help of Pagan della Torre—escaped alive to Milan.

¹ *Vide* Equicola, *op. cit.* This important treaty by Frederick II, " Emperor of the Romans, King of Sicily and Jerusalem," was signed near Goito on 1st October, 1237 ; and it is to be noted that by it Gonzaga was restored to Mantua, " saving the rights of the sons and heirs of Count Albert de' Casaloldi." After Frederick had married (*en secondes nocces*) Yolanda, daughter and sole heiress of Jean de Brienne, King of Jerusalem, he added this to his other titles.

Frederick had probably no personal hostility against the Lombard cities, and desired only to preserve his secular rights as Emperor, which they themselves had always admitted ; but the antagonism of the Church forced him again into war, when his excommunication by Pope Innocent IV lost him the city of Parma, which had been hitherto staunchly Ghibelline. This was a serious blow, for it threatened his communication with Germany ; and in 1247 the Emperor again moved forward a great army, joining the militia of his subject and Ghibelline cities, Cremona, Reggio, Modena, and those of Southern Italy with a strong force of Saracens, to recapture the city of Parma, while its defenders, with the help of the Lombard League, prepared a stubborn defence.

We get a wonderful picture in the pages of Fra Salimbene—a contemporary and actual spectator—of the struggle which followed. “ For the Emperor in his rage (*furibundus et totus inflammatus ex ira*) had founded a new city, which he called Vittoria, in presage of his victory (*in presagium futurorum*) ” ; and thither he vowed to transplant the rebel Parmesans, when he had taken and utterly destroyed their city.¹ “ And the Emperor sent to all his friends that they should come to his help ; and first came Lord Ugo Boterius of Parma, nephew of Lord Innocent the Pope ; and after him came Ezzelino di Romano, who then held rule in the Marches of Treviso, and he had a very great army with him. This man was more feared than the devil, for he held it as nothing to kill men, women, and little children, and practised almost unheard-of cruelties. Nor was Nero like him in his cruelties, nor yet Domitian, nor Decius, or Diocletian, who were the greatest among tyrants. For 11,000 of the Paduans he in one day caused to be burnt in the place of St. George in the city of Verona ; and when he had set fire to the building in which they were, and they were being burnt, he made joust around it (*in hastiludio ludebat*) with his knights. It were a long tale to tell of his cruelties, for they would need a great book. Most surely do I believe that as the Son of God willed to have one special friend whom He made almost like Himself,

¹ Cf. *Cronica Fratris Salimbene*, A.D. 1247. The Frate says here : “ *Temporis illius obsidionis exivi de Parma.* ”

to wit the Holy Francis,¹ so did the devil with this Ezzelino."

There is strong reason for thinking that the terrible cruelties practised at this time by Frederick may have been suggested by this Minister of Evil, who was ever at his side ; as when each day before the walls of Parma " he beheaded three or four, or even more, as seemed good to him, from the men of Parma, Modena, and Reggio who were on the side of the Church, and whom he had in chains," till his own men from Pavia revolted at the cruel work, saying they had come as his soldiers, not as his executioners.² But the man was haunted by suspicion, banned by the Church, and fearing enemies on every side ; so that " he slew even his own councillors, princes, and barons on the charge that they were traitors "—among them his own great minister, Piero delle Vigne, who (it is said) had sought his life by a poisoned cup.

Meanwhile the siege dragged on into the winter. From the cities of Mantua and Ferrara came welcome help in a fleet of boats with provisions which reached the city, driving back the Emperor's son Hensius, who was guarding the Po ; and then came to Parma the miracle of miracles—the great and wonderful victory. For the women of Parma, led by those of the noble and great houses, " had betaken themselves to pray the Blessed Virgin that she would entirely save her Parma from Frederick and other enemies . . . and the Mother of Mercy had brought this petition to her Son." ³ Meanwhile Frederick, weary of the siege, had gone off for a day's hawking, on that fateful day of 18th February, 1248, " in which the city

¹ It is very interesting to see here how in that age, as I have said elsewhere (*Renaissance in Italian Art*, Part I. ch. i.), " the Christ life had come back to earth—the Divine again put on the veil of human form . . . the life-story of Christ and his Passion become blended with that of the ' little poor man ' of Assisi." Frate Salimbene confirms this when he adds: " for, as brother Leo—his own follower—told me, who was present when he was washed for burial on his death, he (Francis) seemed just like one crucified, who had been taken down from the Cross (*sicut unus crucifixus de cruce depositus*)."

² *Vide* Sismondi, *op. cit.* (1247).

³ Twelve years later (1260) Siena, in no less pressing need, in the same way commended herself to the Virgin: " Queen of Heaven, Mother of sinners, . . . be it thine to free and defend this our city from our enemies the Florentines " and the appeal brought once again signal and splendid victory.

of Vittoria was taken. For they of Parma, and all the knights and people, armed and prepared for battle, went forth from Parma, and their women went with them, and in like manner the boys and girls, the old and young, and by force they drove the Emperor from Vittoria, and all his knights and foot soldiers. And many died there, and many were captured and led into Parma; and they freed the captives whom the Emperor held in Vittoria in chains, and they took the "carroccio" of the Cremonese which was in Vittoria, and led it into Parma, and set it in triumph in their Baptistery."

The Emperor, returning from his hawking, was caught among the tide of panic-stricken fugitives and driven with them into Cremona, and his army hunted to the banks of the Taro. His entire treasury was captured, with the Imperial crown—"which was of great weight and value, and all inwoven with gold and precious stones, having many images worked thereon and raised"—and which our Frate held later in his own hands. The city of Vittoria was burnt and made level with the ground. "In that day," adds the writer, "when Frederick was driven to flight by the men of Parma was fulfilled the Scripture which says (Prov. x.) : Like to a storm the impious shall be no more (*quasi tempestas non erit impius*). Why? Because he is cast forth in his wickedness; and he himself fled basely, *miser et miserabilis*, and blind and naked and sad."¹ The churchman's exultation mingles here with pride in the great deed of his own city—"mea civitas Parma"—for the blow was complete and overwhelming; and Frederick, after vainly trying to make his peace with Pope Innocent, through St. Louis of France, returned to his own kingdom of the two Sicilies, and died in his castle of Florentino in 1250, in the fifty-sixth year of his life. Pope Innocent IV, unforgiving to the end, when he heard of his death, wrote to his clergy of the south: "Let the heavens rejoice and be glad!" He entered the Lombard cities with all pomp and triumph,

¹ Very effective with our good Frate is this sudden interrogation, followed promptly by a text hurled at the head of his imaginary opponent. The same method of rhetoric had been followed, no less effectively, against the heretics of his age—Pelagius, Arius, Sabellius, Novatian—by that great Father of the Church, S. Vincentius Lirinensis. "Quid ait Salvator? 'Ex fructibus eorum cognoscetis eos,' " *et sim.*

but seems to have deeply offended the Milanese by his arrogance. He died himself five years later, and was succeeded by the Bishop of Ostia, under the title of Alexander IV.

At this point of our story, not without regret, we leave the guidance of Fra Salimbene, who ends his Chronicle with the death of Frederick II, and the strange prophecies of the magician Merlin. It may be questioned whether the Papacy would have triumphed, as it did, in its duel with the House of Hohenstaufen save for the immense help given by these monks of the Lesser Orders—universal, ubiquitous, penetrating into every corner of mediæval life, as welcome in the hovel or the leper hospital as in the abbey or the palace. Of these our Frate is a typical example; always on the move, he will carry across Europe the propaganda of the Pope, the message of his Order or the last bit of monastic scandal, like that of the false monk Ghirardino Segabello—“*qui filio Dei voluit similari, et de multis stultitiis ejus.*”¹

We might be even tempted to accompany him farther in his wanderings through this wonderful Europe of the Crusades which he knew so intimately—of St. Louis and Popes Gregory and Innocent, of the Lombard Republics, the prophecies of Joachim of Flora, the Sicilian Kingdom of the Hohenstaufen and the tragedy of their race. But already there seem to beckon to us, emergent through the ages, those figures of the Gonzaga, Captains of their People, Marquises and Dukes of Mantua—Luigi the founder and Marquis Lodovico, the brilliant Isabella d’Este and her son the great Cardinal, and the long line of later Dukes—who in my next chapter will make their entry into our story.

¹ This Ghirardinus, like the Frate a native of Parma, tried to start a new order in imitation, or rivalry, of that of St. Francis. “*Nam fecit se circumcidi, quod est contra Apostolum . . . item in cunabulis jacuit fasciis involutus et mammas suxit cujusdam mulieris. . . . Post hæc dicebat sibi a Domino revelatum quod cum puella aliquæ viduæ debebat nudus cum nuda in eodem lecto dormire.*” The widow was evidently a willing dupe or convert—“*reputans se beatam, et puella minime hoc negabat*”; and the whole story reads like the scenario of one of the Novelle in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. The Frate denounces this man and his followers as false prophets: “*qui dicunt apostolos esse, et non sunt . . . congregatio stultorum et bestialium ribaldorum,*” and yet again: “*sunt synagoga Sathané . . . discipulorum Antichristi.*”

CHAPTER III

MANTUA IN THE AGE OF THE DESPOTS

WE have seen that during these last years of Frederick's reign Mantua had been on the side of the Guelph cities, but not very directly involved in the conflict. She had increased her power, had gained the lordship of Valleggio, had rounded her dominions on the east by Ostiglia with its castle; and her own walls, especially the Porta Ceresè, date from this time. She had helped Azzo d'Este to strengthen himself at Ferrara, and had on the south acquired Luzzara, lying between Gonzaga and Guastalla, from the Church, to whom it had come as part of the Countess Matilda's legacy.

But a great peril was now approaching her. The death of Frederick himself had only strengthened the power of the cruel Viceroy to whom he had entrusted the Veronese Marches. "Ezzelino was hereditary lord of Bassano and Piedemonte: he succeeded in making himself named Captain of the People by the Republics of Verona, Vicenza, Padua, Feltre, and Belluno. By this title he united the judicial with the military power; he was subject only to councils which he might or might not assemble. . . . Accordingly he soon changed this authority derived from the people into a frightful tyranny."¹ The accounts of this tyranny are, in fact, simply appalling, and can only be indicated here. In the single town of Padua there were eight prisons, always full—notwithstanding the incessant toil of the executioner to empty them; two of them containing each three hundred prisoners. After his victims had succumbed to the poisonous air of these prisons, or the horrors of torture, he sent the dead bodies to their native towns, and had them beheaded in the public square, or cut in

¹ *Vide* Sismondi, *op. cit.*

pieces and burnt publicly. Not only the nobles but all classes—the merchants, the clergy, the young who had any attraction—were exposed to his ferocity. All would have fled, if flight had been possible; but the tyrant guarded his frontiers, and if any were caught trying to escape they were instantly, without further question, deprived of a leg or had their eyes put out.

This was the enemy who now threatened the Commune of Mantua—"a tyrant unequalled in Italy for bravery and military talent, an enemy to luxury and proof against the seductions of women, making the boldest tremble with a look, and preserving in his diminutive person, at sixty-five, all the vigour of a soldier."¹ He had already in his power Trento, Treviso, Padua, Vicenza and Verona, and from the Brescians themselves had received their own city. "But great though the Tyrant was, his State seemed to him to be maimed and incomplete without Mantua, for that city seemed to him such a place as would enable him in security to give the law to all Lombardy, without fear of his being attacked in return; and finding no progress in the plots which he had hatched, nor in the studied words of envoys, he betook himself to open arms. Then did Ezzelino gather his army from different nations; twelve thousand men from the lands of Padua and Treviso, as many more from Vicenza, Verona and Brescia, and Uberto Pallavicino came to join these with the men of Cremona and Piacenza."

Thus far Mario Equicola;² but Gionta in his Chronicle becomes positively epic upon Mantua's struggle for her freedom. We see the marshalled hosts—even as in the Mantuan poet's *Æneid*; and if on the one side we have Ezzelino, that devilish tyrant, whose military genius was defaced by wanton cruelty and blood-lust, on the other there emerges, as hero and leader, one of the noblest figures in Italian story. When Dante is seeking the path through Purgatory with his Mantuan guide, they meet a soul who wanders there alone:

"Un' anima che posta
Sola soletta, verso noi riguarda."

"We came to him," adds the poet. "O Lombard soul,

¹ Vide Sismondi, *op. cit.*

² Vide Mario Equicola, *op. cit.*

why dost thou stand thus haughty and apart, with such calm dignity in thine uplifted brow ? ” Yet he replied no word : he only ceased to move, and stood now watching us, like as a lion when he crouches at bay ” (*a guisa de leon quando si posa*). Then Virgil drew near to him, praying that he would show us the better ascent . . . but he replied not to our question, but asked us of our country and life, and the sweet guide commenced to reply, “ Mantua ” . . . but then the shadowy spirit, wrapped apart in thought, sprang towards him from the spot where he stood, crying “ O Mantuan, I am Sordello, from thine own land.”

“ Dicendo, O Mantovano, io sono Sordello,
Dalla tua terra—e l’ un l’ altro abbracciava.”

Here the poet goes off into that magnificent invocation to Italy :

“ Ahi serva Italia, di dolore ostello,
Nave senza nocchiero in gran tempesta,
Non donna di provincie, ma bordello . . . ”

in which he expresses his profound despair and humiliation at seeing his beloved land—as we shall see yet later, yet more terribly in these very pages—abandoned by herself, by her own folly, her selfish lack of union, her divided counsels, to be the helpless prey of the invading enemy.¹

But we recover Sordello at the beginning of the next canto, and he remains with the two wanderers to be their guide into those pleasant haunts where, on the green sward, amid the odours of bright flowers, the souls of the departed sing their “ Salve Regina.”

This Sordello we have already seen to have been no mere creation of the poet’s fancy, but a real character of Italian history—a man of extraordinary and very varied talents, and of noble character—the patriot and hero who, in Dante’s verse, awaits the intruders who break in upon his solitude “ *guardando a guisa di leon* ” ; but who, when the one word “ Mantua ” is uttered, changes his mood to warm sympathy

¹ Our own generation has seen her glorious revival—has seen Italy claim her own true place among the great nations : nor can I (who have known and loved her since my boyhood) avoid expressing here my profound satisfaction that my own country, who had no part in her misfortunes in the past, was the first to welcome her *risorgimento* ; that English friends of my own—now, alas, passed away—in those old days had fought beside Giuseppe Garibaldi.

and welcome. He had married, we are told, the daughter of Ezzelino, and had therefore everything to hope and gain from the success of the Tyrant of the Marches. He was a famous soldier, “*huomo di grandissimo animo e vigore*”—and the Chronicler relates his deeds of war in the Regno, and that famous duel in which he worsted two Englishmen and a Burgundian; he was a man of learning, and we have seen that he had won high fame as a poet.

But now, when Mantua was threatened, Sordello stood faithful to his city, then, more than ever, “like a lion at bay.”¹ We see in the pages of the Chronicler Ezzelino advancing through the Mantovano, “with fire and sword destroying all lands of Mantua, and taking the Borghi” (fortified towns and villages) “with cruel massacre of the inhabitants, without respect of youth or age.” In Gionta’s *Fioretto* we find him to have advanced as far as the Ceresse gate of Mantua, and thence summoning the city to surrender. “Then it was that Sordello, who was one of the first men of the city, replied that they would not submit to foreign lordship, or renounce their liberty; and Ezzelino, hearing that his own kinsman had thus defied him, was wroth beyond all bounds, and sent other heralds to bid them yield, or that else he would waste the country and cut down all the vines—nor yet would he raise the siege. For he himself would then plant other vines, and wait before Mantua to drink the wine from them.”² But the Mantuans gave answer that he should not have Mantua while there were men within her walls to defend her; for that they preferred to die as freemen than to live as slaves. Ezzelino, at this reply, beside himself with fury, cut down the vines, wasted the country, and burnt everything. None the less did the Mantuans, led on by Sordello, fight unceasingly for their country against its enemies; and at this time Ezzelino, having learnt that Padua was in revolt, found himself compelled to raise the siege.”

Pope Alexander IV had, in fact, come to the aid of the

¹ See later (Chapter III) for my criticism of this whole Sordello legend, which dates back to Aliprandi; but in which, as far as his part in the siege of Mantua is concerned, the alibi seems now conclusive.

² This picturesque threat refers to the fact that, in planting vines, we must wait some three years before we can touch the grapes.

beleaguered city, and determined to crush "this monster that held in terror the Trevisan March." He preached a crusade against Ezzelino, and offered to his followers in this attack the indulgences reserved for the deliverers of the Holy Land. The Archbishop of Ravenna, as legate of the Pope, came to Venice in 1256, and many Venetians flocked to his standard. Marquis Azzo d'Este of Ferrara, though despoiled by Ezzelino of many of his castles, was still the accepted leader of the Guelph party, and Count di San Bonifacio, Sordello's own feudal lord, held at this time in some manner the lordship over Mantua; and "this lord and Mantua were devoted to the Church and irreconcilable enemies of Ezzelino,"¹ while the Republic of Bologna had joined them, and the Trento was in revolt against the tyrant. On the other hand, Ezzelino was master of Verona, Vicenza, Padua, Feltre and Belluno; and had the support of his brother Alberico,² who ruled Treviso, and of the Ghibellines of Cremona.

It must have been a wonderful scene when, on 18th June of 1256, the crusading army marched forth from Pieve di Sacco, with the Archbishop of Ravenna at their head, surrounded by his priests, and chanting the great hymn of the Church:

"Vexilla Regis prodeunt,
Fulget Crucis mysterium . . ."

They marched direct on Padua, and attacked the city the next day, moving to its walls under the shelter of a wooden gallery, on which the Paduans dropped burning pitch; but in so doing they set fire to their own city gate, and the town was captured. The prisoners were set free, but presented a terrible spectacle—many among them mutilated, children found with their eyes put out, old men and young girls prostrated by their sufferings. We get an echo of these horrors in those marvellous mediæval frescoes in the Pisan Campo

¹ *Vide* Sismondi, *op. cit.*

² Alberico's record in cold-blooded ferocity was little better than that of his brother. We are told that, seizing thirty ladies of Vicenza, he had cut off their dresses from below their breasts, and then forced them to pass beneath their dying relatives, so that these last in their death twitches touched them with their feet. When his brother fell he, with his sons and daughters, were literally torn to pieces by the maddened people. See my *Mantua, Berühmte Kunststätten*, ch. ii.

Santo of the "Triumph of Death," where the maimed, the desperate, victims of these terrible Ghibelline wars, cast forth from the prisons of Ezzelino, noseless, without feet or hands, yet extend their maimed stumps to call vainly for a quick end, for their "last feast with death—*medicina d'ogni pena*." ¹

Once the city was taken, the Paduans received their deliverers with grateful welcome ; but then it was that Ezzelino took his most terrible vengeance—the blackest crime, indeed, of all his devil's work. He had eleven thousand soldiers in his armies from the Paduan district, and from the Pieve di Sacco. He brought them by night to Verona, unsuspecting of their doom, and cast them into his prisons there, with the citizens, priests, and nobles of the revolted lands. They all perished from cold, hunger, thirst, or violence ; out of the eleven thousand only two hundred ever came out alive.² Then he tried vainly to recapture Padua ; but in 1258 he defeated the Brescians, capturing the Papal Legate and the Podestà of Mantua, and the Crusade melted away. It seemed then as if he had triumphed ; yet God's vengeance on his crimes, though slow, was only deferred.

In the year following (1259) a new League was formed by the Ghibelline chiefs of Cremona—Buoso di Doara and the Marquis Pallavicino—and Azzo d'Este with the cities of Ferrara, Padua, and Mantua against the two brothers Ezzelino and Alberico di Romano ; and the forces of the League were to be joined by those of Milan. Ezzelino advanced to attack the latter, but the Milanese, warned in time, retired to defend their own city ; and the tyrant advancing farther, tried to carry Monza by storm, but was repulsed. His position at once became dangerous, for he had now the victorious Milanese in front and the allied forces of the League behind him, with two

¹ *Vide* my description of these frescoes in "The Awakening of Life" (*Renaissance in Italian Art*, Part i. ch. i.). Their message appears in the scroll above them ; but Death has passed them by to strike down the lovers in their garden of delight.

² "To understand such crimes," it has been said, "we must assume a blood lust, like that of savage beasts, which certainly has possessed some evil men." The frequent use of mutilation, as in his capture of Friola, is a terrible feature of these cruelties. Here he caused "the population, of both sexes and all ages, to be deprived of their eyes, noses, and legs, and cast forth." *Vide* Symonds, *Age of the Despots*, ch. iii.

rivers to cross to regain his own country. He had reached Cassano on the Adda, when Azzo d'Este, leading the men of Ferrara and Mantua, carried the bridge-head, and "the enemy of the human race found himself surrounded on every side by his foes in forces superior to his own."

His astrologers—in whom he believed, if he had no fear of God—had warned him of this name Cassano as ill-omened to him, and hearing it he had sought to retire ; but was now compelled to advance in order to regain the bridge. But he was wounded by an arrow in the foot, the enemy closed in, his soldiers fell on every side ; and he himself was again wounded in the head by a man whose brother he had mutilated, and was taken prisoner. "Ezzelino, when prisoner," writes the Chronicler Rolandinus, a contemporary, "preserved a menacing silence. He fixed on the ground his savage eyes, and gave no utterance to his deep indignation. From all sides the soldiers and people came together to see this man, once so powerful ; this prince, famous, terrible, and cruel above all princes of the earth ; and universal joy broke out on all sides." But Ezzelino was protected from outrage ; conducted to the tent of Buoso Doara, he refused the surgeon's aid, tore the dressings from his wounds, and died on the eleventh day from his capture.¹ This was in 1259, in the sixty-seventh year of his life, when his reign of blood had lasted thirty-four years. His brother Alberico had taken refuge in the fortress of San Zeno, but it was betrayed ; retiring to the roof of the tower, with his wife, his six sons and two daughters, he was compelled by hunger to surrender to the Marquis d'Este. They were all killed, and their quartered limbs were sent to the towns over which the House of Romano, now blotted from the earth, had once tyrannized.

"Then the Mantuans," concludes Gionta, "having learnt the loyalty and worth of their Sordello, and deeming him worthy of every honour, made him Lord of Mantua ; and he was their first Lord since the death of the Countess Matilda."

¹ *Vide* Rolandinus, Lib. xii., *De factis in Marchia Trevisana*. He finished his work with the fall of the House of Romano : in 1262 the book was approved by the magistrates and citizens of Padua, who were contemporaries of the story.

Equicola confirms this statement when he says: "Rafaello di Volterra writes that in MCCXX" (the date is doubtful), "Sordello was not only the most leading citizen, but also prince in Mantua" (*non solo principale ma principe*). His account of Sordello's character is no less interesting. "A most valiant man and most prudent, he dwelt at home, honoured by all and devoted to his studies; and added to the frontiers of Mantua by the acquisition of Casalmaggiore, while among strangers without his fame had spread far and wide."

Even if such leadership, as we shall see later, is legendary, it was a time of expansion and progress for the ancient city of Virgil. The river Oglio had been regained from the Cremonese, and the Serraglio completed. Mantua had grown larger; and the city was now divided into quarters—"Santo Stefano, S. Giacompo, S. Martino, and that quarter which contains S. Leonardo." Peace had been made, too, with Verona—the two cities "restoring mutually their prisoners, lands, and castles taken in war, and laying aside all bygone hatreds." It is interesting to note among the signatories to this treaty the name of Pinamonte Bonacolsi, and to those of Vicenza and Padua that of Antonio Gonzaga—both representing great families which will cross our narrative in those days when Mantua was so soon to lose her freedom. But for the moment we see the Commune to stand erect, energetic and self-dependent, after a glorious war in defence of her liberty seeking—and obtaining—a just and honourable peace with her neighbours; and—as claimed at least by her later historians—beneath the wise and unselfish leadership of her great citizen Sordello, whose marble form modern Mantua, mindful of her past, has placed in the centre of her great Piazza, which she named (1872), in place of Piazza di S. Pietro, the Piazza di Sordello. It is fair to add here that this figure of Sordello—the troubadour knight, the Mantuan patriot—is enveloped in romantic legend, which modern criticism has dispersed, with so many others of our cherished illusions. I have followed here (as in my earlier work on Mantua) the account given by her own chroniclers; but with full knowledge of its difficulties, which must now be fully stated. Out of the real man, the "trovatore di Goito," who was born

and lived amongst them, the popular imagination may have created this legendary figure of the patriot hero ; and, in a sense, the legend might even in some points come nearer to the facts than the dry bones of history. For, inspired perhaps by the verse of Dante, it took its beginning very early in the rhymed Mantuan chronicle of Bonamente Aliprandi, to be repeated and amplified by Platina (*Historiæ Mantuanæ*) and Gionta (*Fioretto delle Croniche di Mantova*), Donesmondi, and Equicola in his *History of Mantua*, above quoted. In Aliprandi (1414) we see a youth devoted to his studies, with whom Beatrice, sister of Ezzelino and Alberico Romano, falls madly in love ; and, finding him unresponsive, follows him to Mantua in man's attire, and at last reduces him to marrying her. "How completely and fantastically changed," says De Lollis,¹ and we cannot but agree with him, "from the real and authentic Sordello." Then follows the heroic defence made by Sordello of his Mantuan "Patria"—when he was really far across the Alps in Provence. The whole legend begins to tumble to pieces : what, we may ask, is left to us of the real Sordello ?

What remains is so interesting, such a fragment of the real life of that age of romance, that it almost consoles us for the lost legend. Sordello was certainly born (about 1200) in Goito, some ten miles to the north-west of Mantua ; and we find him residing soon after 1220 at the Court of the Count San Bonifacio, who had married Cunizza, the daughter of Ezzelino who appears, like Sordello himself, in the verse of Dante (*Paradiso*, Canto IX. 32), though she is placed by the poet in the Heaven of Venus, while her father (*Inferno*, Canto XII.) no less appropriately is found in Hell, among quite a distinguished circle of tyrants.² Sordello must have been in close relations with the Lord of Romano, for, with the connivance of Ezzelino, he seems to have carried off Cunizza from her husband, and taken her back to her father's Court. But there he fell into a serious love affair and *liaison* with the lady her-

¹ Vide De Lollis, *Vita e Poesia di Sordello*.

² He is in the boiling river of blood (*bolloz vermiglio*) beside Albizzo d'Este, Alexander, and Dionysius the Sicilian tyrant, and is pointed out to Dante by the Centaur, his faithful escort " . . . that brow, which has the hair so black, is Azzolino."

self. Ezzelino gave short shrift to those who came across his path ; he had a partiality, as we have seen, for removing portions of their anatomy, and his Paduan prisons were not considered by his contemporaries as healthy. Can we wonder that Sordello found a change of air from his Court at this time highly desirable ; while the beautiful and amorous Cunizza took refuge with her brother Alberico at Treviso, where she gave herself to a knight named Bonio, with whom she wandered over the world, living a life of pleasure and sparing no expense.¹ Meanwhile Sordello himself had gone to the castle of the two Lords of Strasso, “ who were his close friends (*eran mout siei amici*,” but even there the little God of Love—who afflicts us all, but especially the race of poets—gave him no rest ; for he fell into a fresh love affair with, and even married secretly, the sister of his friends (*et esposet un soa seror celadamen*), whose name was Otha (*qui avia nom Otha*).

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Either this scandal or that of Cunizza—or both combined—made Italy no longer safe for the too attractive and impressionable poet. He made his way across the Alps and wandered, a troubadour knight, through Southern France, over the Pyrenees as far as the Court of Leon in Spain, and thence on to Portugal. But even a troubadour knight could not live on air, and the best—and perhaps only—chance of a living was to attach himself to some feudal Court, make himself generally useful and agreeable, and take his fair share in any fighting that offered. This is precisely what Sordello did : for returning to Provence, he became the knight of its ruler, Count Raymond Berenger ; and after this patron's death attached himself to the Count's son-in-law, the turbulent and ambitious Charles d'Anjou. In these Provençal Courts the love of poetry had taken firm hold ; and Sordello, who had probably learnt the art of verse in Provençal in Italy, now perfected himself both in style and subject-matter, and his Muse—perhaps under the inspiration of the lovely Guida di Rodez, now installed as lady of his heart—rose to loftier heights. Apart from his love

¹ “ *Nimium amorata*,” we are told, “ *in eum cum ipso mundi partes plurimas circuivit, multa habentes solacia et maximas expensas.*” Cunizza was evidently preparing for the place to be assigned to her later among the “ *spiriti amanti* ” in the heaven of Venus.

poems, one of his finest and strongest efforts is the lament for Blacatz, one of Count Raymond's barons who had died. In this remarkable poem he criticizes very freely the different monarchs of Europe at this time, and to Frederick II he gives as his counsel : " Let him eat of the heart (of Blacatz), of which he has great need, this Emperor of Rome, if he wishes to conquer by force of arms the Milanese, who hold him humiliated,¹ and he lives disinherited, in spite of his Germans." The King of France, who follows next, and the King of England—" for he is but little courageous "—are recommended the same diet, as well as the King of Castile, " who holds two kingdoms and is not worth one " ; and the poem concludes with an invocation to his "*Belh Restaur*" (*i.e.* " lovely solace "), who may be the beautiful Guida di Rodez, married to the Lord of Montlaur, who meets us perhaps as the " pros Contessa " of his chanson to Pier Guillem, and the " doussa enemia " of other poems.

Among Sordello's love poems, very typical and beautiful is that one with the frequent refrain :

" Ailas, e que m'fau miey huelh
Quer non vezon so qu'ieu vuelh ? "

(" Alas, what joy to me are my eyes from the moment that they no longer see what I long for ? ") " When the summer renews itself," he cries, " with leaves and flowers, since she who is a lady full of pleasure prays me to rejoice, I will sing. I will sing even though I die of love, because I so love her ; though but seldom may I see her whom I adore." And again comes the refrain, "*Ailas, e que m'fau miey huelh.*" " Among the troubadours, his contemporaries," says Bertoni,² " the substance of chivalrous love became refined away into something ethereal, impalpable " ; though it may be permitted us to doubt whether his or their passions were always so immaterial as their verses would suggest. For Sordello was a man of action, and in no ways inclined to mystic exaltation : in his *Documentum Honoris* he shows a mind directed to an immediate

¹ This reference to Frederick II has been suggested to date this poem before his victory over the Milanese at Cortenuova, but this is not at all certain ; the symbolism of eating the heart finds an echo later in Dante.

² *Vide* Guilio Bertoni, *I trovatori d'Italia* : Biografie, etc.

and practical end ; and when his new Lord of Anjou called him to the Crusades we have seen (*vide* ch. ii.) what was his response. But when Charles d'Anjou made his adventurous descent upon Italy—called thither by the Pope to destroy the Hohenstaufen—Sordello was certainly among his followers : he probably came over the passes, down the Val di Susa, and was captured, for we find him—by a letter (September 22, 1266) of Clement IV to Charles d'Anjou—a prisoner at Novara. His first Lord, the Count di San Bonifacio, had died (1253), and all the terrible Romano brood, as we saw, were now blotted out ; only the once lovely and faithless Cunizza was still living, and had found a refuge with the Cavalcanti at Florence.

After the desperate conflict at Benevento (1266)—when Manfred, son of Frederick II, pursued by the implacable hatred of Pope Clement, was totally defeated and killed by Charles d'Anjou—Sordello, as one of the victor's Provençal knights, was rewarded by a gift of fiefs in the Abruzzi, with the castles of Palena, Monte Odorisio, Civitaquana, and Ginestra, under deeds dated May and June 1269. " His figure," says Bertoni, " begins little by little to lose its historic features, and to enter those of legend ; and in the mind of the people to assume greater dimensions—as those of a hero who had risen out of his difficulties, who had never forgotten his country, and returned to her at the height of his fame. The Sordello of history, touched by the poetic fancy of Dante, rose to become the incarnation of love for his country."

We may well believe that Dante, looking back to the generation before, had been fascinated by the story of those terrible Lords of Romano ; and, while he gave Ezzelino his merited doom, had set the erring Cunizza in his *Paradiso* among the great lovers of the past, and had seen in Sordello—like himself, not alone a poet of love, but one who had dared to challenge the rulers of his time—an incarnation of the spirit of Italy, another Mantuan poet, who should be his guide within the shadowy world between Hell and Paradise.

Among our own Victorian poets, one of the greatest had chosen this figure of Sordello as his theme ; and I approached the work of Robert Browning with the hope of gaining fresh light upon this subject. Our poet has pictured Sordello's youth

in the old castle of Goito, has shown his warm, creative spirit, like some exuberantly fertile soil—

“ Half germinating spices ; mere decay
 Produces richer life ; and day by day
 New pollen on the lily-petal grows,
 And still more labyrinthine buds the rose . . . ”

and analyses this richly sensitive soul of the poet in its first, inevitable and (as so often elsewhere) fatal conflict with the hard, coarse realities of life. But neither the Sordello of the earlier legend nor that of history find their place in this complex study of a temperament, behind whom the figures of Azzo d'Este and Ecelin, Taurello and Friedrich, Adelaide and Palma, Guelph and Ghibelline, move—dim, fantastic, entirely incomprehensible—within an atmosphere of political intrigue and periodic massacre ; and after some nine hundred lines of this analysis the reader, like an exasperated contemporary, may be tempted to exclaim that there are only two intelligible lines in this whole poem of “ Sordello ”—these being the first and last, and that both are equally false.¹

But if this figure of Sordello, as Mantuan patriot and hero, had a more than doubtful share in her defence, it is certain that, in these very years when he passes out of our sight, the brightest days of the Mantuan Commune, which had held her own against northern Emperors and nearer tyrants, were already ended—the meshes of her golden servitude spread very close.

For circumstances had at this time arisen which, everywhere throughout the peninsula, threatened the freedom of the Italian Communes. If I have mentioned in some detail these two central figures in their time—of Frederick II and his Viceroy in North Italy, Ezzelino—it is because in a peculiar sense they

¹ I have heard this criticism of “ Sordello ” attributed to the late Lord Tennyson ; the first line, as my readers may remember, reading, “ Who will may hear Sordello's story told ” ; and the last, “ Who would has heard Sordello's story told.” The writer does, however, refer to the earlier legend in the lines :

“ The chroniclers of Mantua tired their pen
 Telling how Sordello Prince Visconti saved
 Mantua . . . ”

and has identified (Book v.) his figure of Palma with Dante's Cunizza.

foreshadowed the coming change. The great historian of the Italian Republics recognizes this when he says: "The defeat of Ezzelino and the destruction of the family of Romano may be regarded as the last great effort of the Lombards against the establishment of tyranny in their country. About this time the cities began to be accustomed to absolute power in a single person." No less does Symonds admit this when he says: "In Frederick, the modern autocrat, and Ezzelino, the legendary tyrant, we obtain the earliest specimens of two types of despotism in Italy: . . . while Frederick foreshadowed the comparatively modern tyrants of the coming age, his Vicar in the north of Italy, Ezzelino da Romano, represented the atrocities towards which they always tended to degenerate. . . . Their fame after their death powerfully affected the fancy of the people, and created a consciousness of tyranny in the minds of irresponsible rulers."¹

It might be possible, as the writer just quoted admits, to overstrain our estimate of this influence; but it remains clear that the change that took place at this very time is indisputable. The turbulent presence of the nobles, carrying on their hereditary feuds within the city itself, was a constant menace to fair order; and the custom became prevalent of giving the command of the militia to the first officer of justice, who had the judicial and military power in his hands, under the title of Podestà or Captain of the People—a power which easily became dangerous to liberty. We may watch, in fact, this change taking place at this very time within Mantua, in the pages of her chroniclers. "There were within the city four families most powerful, and four others of scarcely less weight—in the quarter of S. Pietro the Bonacolsi and Grossolani; in that of S. Martino the Arlotti and Poltroni; in that of S. Jacopo the Casaloldi and they of Riva; in the larger quarter the Zenacalli and Gaffari. All the while the power of factions and parties increased daily; the Podestà, generally a foreigner, administered his power under their influence; justice and its power of punishment was trodden under foot, and equity yielded to violence."

"In so great confusion of parties, a public Council was

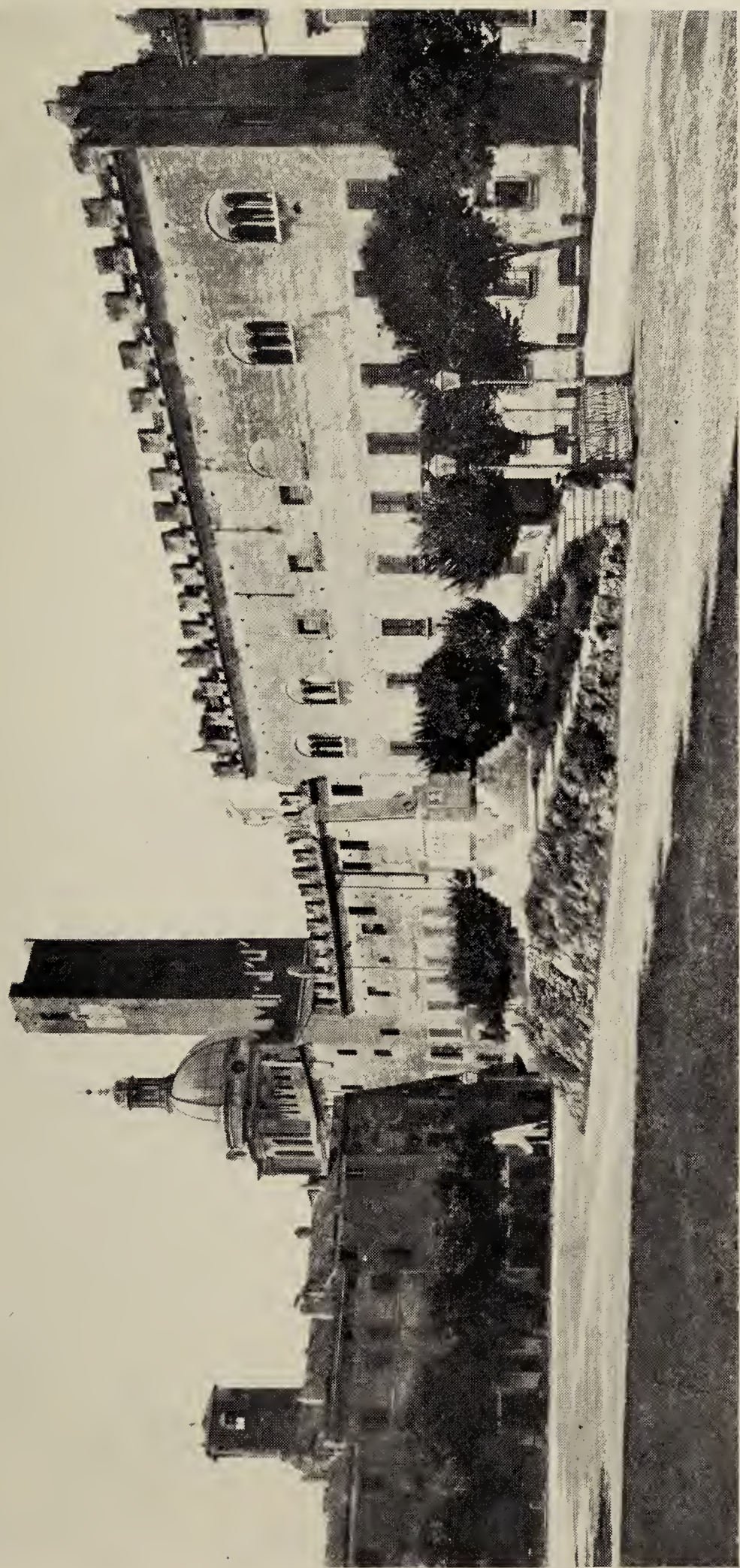
¹ *Vide* Symonds, *Age of the Despots*, ch. iii.

called to discuss of the public weal, and of the best form of civil government. . . . The Mantuans inclined to the Roman wont, and gave orders that two citizens with full authority should be elected every six months from two quarters of the city ; and they gave to these magistrates the name of Captains (*Capitani*), for so were called those who took the people under their protection, and showed themselves liberal to all classes in the State. Two Captains were therefore chosen in Mantua from the body of nobility, as it were to be tribunes of the people ; these were Pinamonte de' Bonacolsi and Ottonello de' Zenacalli, elected in the year MCCLXXIV." ¹ The first step towards despotism was thus taken. The lamb had now confidently reposed its head on the wolf's shoulder ; and the result was prompt and (to the lamb) disastrous.

We have now followed the fortunes of Mantua from her early legendary history, through the splendours of the Roman dominion and the vicissitudes of war and siege throughout the ages, until at length, with the repulse of Ezzelino, we saw her emerge as an individual and independent State. What, we may ask, were the forces which governed her Commune from these years of 1150 to 1220, which contributed to her success, or threatened her further existence as a free city ? On the one side we shall see that passion for freedom, which more than once saved her from external or internal perils ; on the other, the constant jealousies with neighbouring Republics, and, within her own walls, the divisions of her citizens themselves, and of noble with burgher or noble. The nobles, with their rank and wealth, found a direct entrance into the magistracy of the State, and, with this power in their hands, made war one against another, pursued their vendettas and, to secure themselves from attack, raised those towers which appear in Mantua in these times of the great families of the Bonacolsi, Ansandri, Visdomini, Arlotti, and Cremaschi—of which traces still remain in those of the Bonacolsi and Ansandri.

The Bonacolsi Palace, with its embattled walls and two great external towers, was a typical example of these fortresses ; and here covered approaches or arcades permitted their friends, in the event of attack, to rejoin them at once within

¹ Vide Equicola, *op. cit.* Lib. i.



THE PALACE OF THE BONACOLSI AT MANTUA

the palace for mutual help. Meanwhile the people, divided into guilds and corporations, were more concerned to keep the privileges attached to these than to quell the turbulent nobles. In fact we find, about 1207, the two noble families of the Poltroni and Ansandri at open war within the city, and two years later the Bonacolsi in S. Pietro, and Poltroni and Arlotti in S. Martino, watching each other in hostile defiance. At the same time the wretched people were called upon to repulse the attacks of the Imperialists, to fight against the cities of Ferrara, Verona, and Cremona, and to later withstand the tyrant Ezzelino. No wonder that at last they found it better to be at the mercy of one than many masters.

Such was the position when, in 1274, Pinamonte Bonacolsi became Captain of Mantua; when—as I have ventured to suggest in *Æsopian* story—the lamb and the wolf commenced to take an affectionate interest in each other's society. The sequel to this friendship was as rapid and dramatic as that of the fable. "They" (the two newly elected Captains) "had not been together a month in office when Zenacallo, being called at night to confer with his colleague, as on some matter of importance, into the Bonacolsi Palace, as he passed between the two doors was suddenly given to instant death." I quote here Equicola's account, which is confirmed by Gionta, who says that "Bonacolsi had him secretly slain with his servant, so that none could ever trace out the author of the crime."

It is fair to remember that both these accounts date from later years when the Gonzaghi were in power, and that another story tells us that Pinamonte denounced his colleague for treason; but even so there are grave reasons to suspect that the truth may not be unlike what these two careful annalists describe to us—a dark deed, hidden away within that grim old Mantuan palace. Certain it is that the Bonacolsi remained alone as Captain; and "the morning following called together the nobles, and set before them his story, with assumed complaints and tears, and called the people to vengeance, seeking to persuade them that his colleague had been killed by private enemies. This inquiry he kept up so long that no one spoke any more of a successor to the dead man: wherefore, having given the hint to his followers, Pinamonte was re-elected for

another six months. Then, next in order, feeling that he had laid secure foundations which would sustain any edifice of power, he sought the title of Captain-General ; which thing the nobles brooked ill, recognizing that from free men they were becoming little by little subject to the tyrant.”¹ We know, in fact, from other sources that Bonacolsi, with the people’s approval, was elected (1274) Captain of the People, and (1276) Captain-General of Mantua.

The great families of Mantua in the middle of the thirteenth century were the Casaloldi, Arlotti, Zenacalli, and Bonacolsi ; but the Corradi da Gonzaga had influence in the city as early as 1196, and were favoured by the Bonacolsi, who even supported them against the Casaloldi—probably from jealousy of these last. Not only this, but the Bonacolsi had permitted Corrado de’ Corradi to acquire the property (*beni*) of Bonaventura Zenacallo, when he was banished, and had given to a Gonzaga the position of Podestà of Modena ; and when, later, the monks of S. Benedetto in Polirone—who found these Corradi getting too powerful—asked (1303) Passarino Bonacolsi for his help, the Scaligeri of Verona supported the Corradi in maintaining their claim. Thus it seems clear that the influence and power of the Gonzaga were taking firm root, while the Bonacolsi, now despots of Mantua, were fully occupied with their rivals in the city, who were chafing beneath their rule.

“ Wherefore the Arlotti, Casaloldi, Agnelli, and Grossolani conspired to remove this yoke from the city. But Pinamonte, being advised of their plot that very day when it should have been carried out, suddenly attacked the conspirators separately ere they could unite ; of whom part were taken, others wounded, many killed, and a great number sought safety in flight ; and Pinamonte never ceased to follow up his opponents until at length the whole city seemed entirely quiet beneath his rule.”

Aspiring to yet greater things, death cut short his plans ; but his tyranny had taken such root in Mantua that at his death Bardellone Bonacolsi kept it for himself—a man of no character, inept and arrogant, who was driven from it by Bottigella Bonacolsi “ with little effort, nay, with a few words alone.” This Bottigella proved to be one of the strongest

¹ *Vide Equicola, op. cit.*

of his race, and having brought Mantua to his sway, "applied his mind to building, and erected," says Equicola, "the Palace in the Piazza, that first building on the left on entering." This palace was destined to pass into the hands of his rivals and successors, who were later to create within this Piazza that vast pile of buildings which became known as the *Reggia dei Gonzaghi*; and there seems no doubt that the same palace was the scene of the last Bonacolsi's tragic end. But at that moment the star of their House seemed in the ascendant; and we find Bottigella involved in all the complex web of north Italian politics, in which Reggio, Modena, Cremona, Azzo, Marquis of Este, and Ghiberto, Lord of Correggio, succeed each other through a course of involved wars and intrigue which we cannot attempt to follow. When Bottigella died, in 1308, his brother Passarino followed him in the lordship and in his general policy. At that time Mantua and her suburbs could put into the field about 10,000 men, ready for battle, "for the which cause the city was a terror to her foes, and Passarino held in the greatest esteem and reputation through all the cities of Italy." An important feature of his foreign policy is his union with the Visconti of Milan and the Della Scala of Verona against Papal aggression. In so doing, Passarino became definitely Ghibelline, and was assailed, along with his allies, by Pope John XXII—now with interdicts, excommunications, and abuse, and now with promises and flattery. But Passarino drew only closer to the Empire, and in so doing perhaps gave offence to the party at Mantua, which soon after caused his fall.

That fall is more remarkable since at this time the power of the Bonacolsi seemed fairly established; but we have here to remember the influence of two important factors: that we have found, during the period preceding, Mantua completely Guelph in her sympathies and as resolutely anti-Ghibelline; and again, that the power of the Gonzaga, within the city and without, had been growing for many years; and both these may well have combined under the stimulus of a personal wrong.¹ In 1327, Passarino had been to Trent to pay his court

¹ Equicola says of Passarino that he was of small stature; and that his ancestors were Guelph, but he himself Ghibelline.

to Louis of Bavaria, and both he and his son had been proclaimed Vicars Imperial—the one of Mantua, the other of Modena ; it was, in fact, on his return thence (in 1328) that a well-planned and successful conspiracy cost Passarino both his throne and life. “ I believe,” writes Equicola at this point, “ that ungoverned and immoderate love has been the cause of ruin to the powerful, who seek for more than is lawful or right. . . . The blood of Roman Lucrezia was a powerful cause of the expulsion of the Tarquins ; and Propertius, a poet among the most elegant, tells us there are no greater enmities than those occasioned by love.”

With this preamble he tells his story—which is substantially the same as those of Gionta and Corio, though differing slightly from Aliprando and Volterrano—that Francesco, son of Passarino Bonacolsi, was in love with the wife of Filippino Gonzaga, and that both she and her husband were wronged by Francesco ; and that hence commenced the plot, in which the Gonzaga took part, from these private wrongs, and other nobles from their jealousy of the insolence and arrogance of the Bonacolsi.

“ Knowing therefore,” says Gionta, “ the secret discontent of the people, and the hatred of the nobles towards these Bonacolsi, Luigi Gonzaga, a man of prudence, and kinsman through his women-folk to Passarino, sent, in July of 1328, Guido his son to Marmirolo, on pretence of looking after his estates there ; but ordered him to go on thence to Cane della Scala at Verona, knowing that there existed some difference between the Scaligero and the Bonacolsi.” The matter, in fact, was easy to compass ; for they found the Della Scala ready and willing to give his aid. An order was taken that, from the 1st of August, each day should enter into Mantua, separately, foot soldiers of proved fidelity to the Scaligero, but not cognizant of more than that they must obey a certain head assigned to them. Then—Guido having now brought over to his wishes the Captain of the Court—on the 16th day of August, all of a sudden, Filippino, with Alberto di Savoia and his father Luigi Gonzaga, issued forth armed from their houses, with much people, calling aloud “ Viva il Popolo.”

“ Passarino, hearing the tumult, sprang on horseback,

thinking with his presence to still it. But when he had come beneath the tower of the Palazzo del Ragione, he was struck on the face, and then, mad with rage, was carried forward by his frantic horse, striking his head against the archway of the great palace which looks on the Piazza S. Pietro. Falling there, he was suddenly surrounded by his enemies, while Francesco, his son, as well as his nephew, were taken prisoners ; and soon afterwards Francesco, given into the hands of Niccolo della Mirandola, his enemy, after many tortures was deprived of life.¹ Many others of his following, imprisoned in Castellarò, died there ; and so, after five-and-fifty years of power, the tyranny of the Bonacolsi had its end."

Thus fell in a day—almost in an hour—the great House of the Bonacolsi, which had seemed so firmly established, within the city and without, by its success, its alliances, and Imperial support. It fell at the very height of its power and success—a frightful example of the insecure position of these Italian despotisms. The whole race was apparently stamped out with wholesale slaughter by its enemies. In their place the Gonzaga dynasty now appears : first of all, in the form of Luigi Gonzaga, to whom, with the people's consent, the government of the city was now given. The future history of Mantua was henceforth intimately involved with that of the Gonzaghi. Yet—since the city had shown herself already incapable of preserving those conditions which make popular government a blessing, and not a curse—perhaps her happiest fate was to be thus in the hands of a permanent dynasty, whose fame as leaders in war equalled their culture of the " *Literæ Humaniores*," and who were to bring their city into touch with all that was richest and best in the life of the new age.

¹ It is stated here that the father of this Niccolo had been "killed by Passarino, through treachery and without cause." *Vide Equicola, op. cit. Lib. i.*

CHAPTER IV

THE GONZAGA—CAPTAINS OF THE PEOPLE

THE fall of the Bonacolsi—sudden, complete, and final—was followed by the entry of Casa Gonzaga into the Lordship of Mantua as Captains-General of the People. A successful plot had placed this power within their grasp, but it was now legitimized by proclamation (1329) and solemn act of election, to which the leading families of Mantua—the Agnelli, Alberighi, Andreasi, Arrivabene, Boccamaggiori, Capilupi, Donesmondi and others (some of whose names survive to our own day)—set their signature ; while Luigi Gonzaga received from the President of the Commune his wand of office—“ bacchetta del Capitanato ”—in front of the assembled people in the Piazza di S. Pietro, before he entered that church for the blessing of the Bishop. The proclamation then made gave him the title of Captain-General and Lord of Mantua ; and thus, says Equicola, “ with the consent of the people, and according to the laws and customs of the city, one person was of their own free will chosen, to whom and to whose successors the rule should be given for ever (*in perpetuo*). . . . That Prince is worthy of his subject’s affection who is ready to set aside private wrongs, and skilled to heal the wounds of the body politic—yet not so easy or generous that in healing one he lets the whole body perish. Such, indeed, was the rule of Luigi Gonzaga in Mantua.”¹ This was written much later, when the Gonzaga power was firmly settled, and it is a question whether the descent in one family was really established at this stage ; but the citizens of Mantua seem to have recognized—what we recognize now—that probably the best fate that could befall their city, too turbulent and divided for freedom,

¹ *Vide* Equicola, *op. cit.* Lib. ii.

was the strong and fairly just rule of the Gonzaga. In fighting for their security they were preserving the independent existence of their State, threatened on every side by powerful neighbours ; in filling, in a later generation, their brilliant Court with artists, poets, and Humanists, they were giving a new splendour to the ancient city, which became very soon under their guidance one of the most powerful in Northern Italy. But two great dangers already threatened the future of the new-born dynasty, derived from its own family dissensions and the growing power of the Visconti at Milan ; and these two storm-clouds tended, not unnaturally, to become united.

For the moment, under Luigi's wise government, all seemed going smoothly, and Reggiolo and Asola (1331) were added to the Mantuan power, with the Castle of Suzzara, Sermide, Canneto, and all the waters of the Oglio ; and Luigi, in the year following his election, received from the Emperor Louis the title of Vicar Imperial of Mantua, while the gift of that city by Pope John XXII to Mastino della Scala had no practical effect whatever. Luigi was on good terms with the Este Princes of Ferrara, and in 1335 he married his niece Beatrice Gonzaga to Niccolo d'Este. Five years later (1340), three brides entered the city of the Gonzaghi—one, a Malaspina, destined (as his third wife) for Luigi himself ; another, Paola Beccaria of Pavia, for his son Corrado ; a third, Verde, daughter of Mastino della Scala, Lord of Verona, for Ugolino Gonzaga, son of Guido.

The wedding festivities, the guests, even the presents, are described in appreciative detail by the old chroniclers, and seem to suggest that the feminine cult of lovely frocks was in full swing in this fourteenth century. "The ladies," says Gionta, "all made their entry together, and the above-mentioned Lords were present to meet them with their kinsfolk ; and to them were then given thirty-eight robes, and thirty-three marks of silver in the form of vessels, cups, and vases, and twenty-eight horses valued at 2100 scudi, and great triumph was made " ; and Equicola further tells how Luchino Visconti gave "twenty-four robes of the finest cloth embroidered with silver, the Ambassadors of Milan twenty-two

more of varied colours, many of which were velvet lined with fur. The Venetian Ambassador two splendid robes of crimson velvet lined with different furs, the Marquis d'Este twelve robes of scarlet and green, six lined with lamb skins and six with others, all embroidered with silver, and Mastino della Scala twenty-four with buttons of silver " ; while the Carrara, Cavalcabò, Beccheria, Landi, Malaspina, Pallavicino, Scotti, and the Lords of Correggio are among the long list of guests. Horses of war were also among the gifts, presumably for the men, four from the Este of Ferrara, the same number from Mastino della Scala, three from the Polenta, three from Azzo of Correggio ; and this is specially interesting, because we shall find the love of horses for riding and racing to become a later passion with this House of Gonzaga.

It is true that this peace with neighbouring princes was not long to remain, for in the year following (1341) the Gonzaga quarrelled with the Scaligero of Verona, through having helped the Lord of Correggio to take Parma from his rule ; and Mastino della Scala, with Obizzo d'Este, entered the Mantovano in the month of June, and laid it waste with fire and sword. Yet Luigi Gonzaga could not only hold his own against the Della Scala, but at the same time send two thousand horsemen to aid Pisa against Florence—which shows the forces at his disposal ; while his brothers Filippino and Feltrino, both great captains of war, with the armed help of Luchino Visconti of Milan, drove back and routed the Della Scala, and a truce on both sides followed. In a comparatively short period of years the Gonzaga had become lord not only of all the Mantuan territory and that of Reggio, but of a great part of that of Brescia and Verona. He held Montechiaro, Casalmaggiore, Castelfelfredo, Piadena, and even the banks and fishing rights of Lago di Garda. He was on terms of equal friendship, alliance, or rivalry with the neighbouring rulers of Verona, Ferrara, and the Visconti at Milan ; and it was from these last that was now to come the most serious peril that his new power had yet encountered.

This took the form of a quattrocento scandal, though behind it was the growing power of the Visconti, soon to become a menace to all Italy ; and on May 24, 1348, came to

the city the herald of Luchino Visconti, to avenge the hatred which he had against Ugolino Gonzaga, of whom report went forth that he had wronged the said Luchino's wife. Ugolino was the eldest son of Guido, and grandson of Luigi Gonzaga ; and " Fusca di Fiesco of Genoa " (her baptismal name Isabella de' Fieschi), " the wife of Luchino Visconti, having fallen in love with the most beautiful Ugolino Gonzaga, persuaded her husband that at the birth of her twin sons, a little before this, she had vowed to God to spend the Day of Assumption in Venice. I am not free," continues Mario Equicola,¹ " to positively assert whether it was in Milan that they plucked the fruit of love, where the aforesaid Ugolino had gone to pay his respects at the most sumptuous baptism " (he refers evidently to the twins), " or whether it was in the passing visit she made to Mantua, or in Venice itself." In any case, the report of these lovers got abroad, and came through Mastino della Scala to the ears of her husband.

As a consequence of this, " on the 24th day of May 1348 the Communes of Brescia and Cremona in accord together, acting at the express instigation of Luchino, sent their Syndics and Procurators into Mantua, accompanied by trumpeters, who in the midst of the Piazza made loud discourse, with threats that if by a certain fixed day the Mantuans had not restored the lands, places, and fortresses which they held in their territory, and the incomes and fruits enjoyed from these lands, they would declare war on them, and defy them as open and public enemies. To them was given the reply: That which with arms, with honour and victory, the city has manfully acquired, with arms, victory, and honour she has the will, force, and power to maintain as her own"—a high-spirited reply indeed, and which we may consider more worthy of praise in that the Mantuans were assured that with Luchino were confederated the neighbouring cities of Ferrara and Verona, each of which was their own equal in power and riches.

We find, in fact, the next five-and-fifty years (1348-1403) of our story mainly occupied with the persistent and determined efforts of the Visconti, Lords of Milan, to gain possession

¹ *Vide Equicola, op. cit. ch. ii.*

of Mantua. Only two facts saved her from sharing the fate of her neighbour and rival, Cremona : one being her immensely strong natural position, with the outer fence of the Serraglio and the inner one of her lakes ; the other that her Gonzaga rulers proved themselves throughout a fighting race of splendid quality. In this case it was Filippino Gonzaga, brother of Guido, who came to the rescue—"the intrepid," he is called by the chronicler, "ready in any event to die for his country and her glory"—in whom first appears the tradition of the Gonzaghi as great military leaders. Recalled by Guido to defend Mantua, while his brother Feltrino held Montanara and his nephew Ugolino Curtatone, together they attacked and completely routed the enemy on the last day of September, 1348—"a memorable victory for the Gonzaghi, and glorious for our renowned Mantua." The plague, as so often happened in these days, had followed in the train of war, and in Mantua and her territory is said to have killed two-thirds of the population ; but the death (1349) of Luchino Visconti—"not," says Equicola, "without suspicion of poison from the aforesaid Isabella"—brought peace with Milan, though the bad feeling between the Gonzaghi and Della Scala continued, and led to frequent raids and consequent reprisals.

An event to be noted at this time is the visit of the famous poet Francesco Petrarca, who came from Parma in 1349 to visit the city of Virgil, and became intimate with Guido Gonzaga, to whom he is said to have addressed his "*Romanzo della Rosa*" ; and in the year following, when the Gonzaga were confirmed by the Emperor as Vicars Imperial of Mantua and Modena, they seem to have been still taking over formally the Bonacolsi possessions. Two years later (1352) we find Feltrino Gonzaga busied in completing the city walls from the Porta de' Mulini to the Church of S. Niccolo ; and in the course of this work, we are told, the towers of the Cremaschi and Ansandri were destroyed, as well as the tower and palace of Sordello, in the Piazza of S. Pietro, and the material used upon the walls.

The first sign of trouble within Casa Gonzaga itself begins to appear at this time in the conduct of this Feltrino, who supported an unsuccessful rebellion in Verona against Can

Grande della Scala, and was taken prisoner—his conduct being disowned by his own father, Luigi Gonzaga. This was in 1354, and four years later the sudden death of Filippino Gonzaga—famed as “one of the leading masters in Italy of the art of war, which he understood to perfection”—was a blow to his now aged father, and a serious loss to Mantua. For the trouble with Milan was by no means over, and reappears (1357) when Bernabò de’ Visconti enters the Serraglio with a great army, burning, pillaging, and making prisoners to the grave loss of Mantua. The Gonzaga, however, in alliance with Ferrara, Bologna and Florence, set Ugolino Gonzaga at the head of his forces, who drove the enemy back, defeated them with loss at Montechiaro, and, entering the Milanese territory, stormed and captured the castle of Bernabò Visconti himself.

While Ugolino went later to Milan under safe conduct to arrange for terms of peace—which included a tribute to Milan, and his own marriage with Caterina Visconti¹—his uncle Feltrino, against the wish of Luigi Gonzaga, had seized Reggio for himself and fortified it strongly. After peace was made he refused to give it up, and was proscribed by Ugolino, who burned publicly his “insegne,” declared him an enemy, and deprived him of every honour of Casa Gonzaga; and after his marriage (1359), joined his troops with Bernabò Visconti to attack Feltrino, who in spite of this remained master of Reggio.

It was in the year following (1360) that Luigi Gonzaga passed away, at the great age of ninety-two. What Cosimo was to the Medici of Florence, that was Luigi to the Gonzaga—the founder of the dynasty—“the beginning of Casa Gonzaga after they had the rule of Mantua—a man of the highest prudence,” says the chronicler, “and so esteemed in all things. His title was Captain-General and Lord of Mantua, and

¹ The terms of peace were that Governolo and Borgoforte should be restored, the Serraglio cleared of Milanese troops, and that Ugolino should marry the daughter of Matteo Visconti: but Gionta, Corio, and Equicola give their own versions, and the matter of tribute seems extremely doubtful. Feltrino was finally ejected from Reggio, and died in 1376. His sons, Guido and Guglielmo, were Counts of Novellara and Bagnolo; but his separatist attempt to form a State and dynasty of his own had collapsed.

Perpetual Vicar there of the Empire.” He left the bulk of his possessions to his first-born son Guido ; and “on the 21st day of February 1360 came together the Council of the Commune for the nomination of a new Captain-General and Lord of Mantua, when with unanimous vote was proposed and approved the election of Guido Gonzaga, first-born of the deceased . . . but he was joined in the government by his eldest son Ugolino, not without jealousy of Lodovico and Francesco, his younger brothers.”¹

Here two points are to be specially noticed—one being that, for the first time, the direct descent of the Gonzaga in the lordship of Mantua was recognized ; and the other, that family dissensions (for Luigi had been a much-married man, and the trouble now reappears in this third generation) threw yet again their shadow over Casa Gonzaga, and in fact led directly, at this very time, to one of those terrible domestic tragedies which are such a feature in the story of these Italian despotisms, and of which Milan and Ferrara, as well as Mantua, offer frequent examples.

In the year 1362 “the plague was very fierce in Mantua, and Lodovico and Francesco, both brothers of Ugolino, went to stay at Castiglione Mantovano, and commenced there to murmur against Ugolino, who had alone the Lordship of Mantua, and they with no share or management in it. Hence they resolved to kill him, and coming to Mantua put their purpose at once into effect.”² “It was on the evening of October 14 that they had returned to the city, and were invited to supper by Ugolino. Lodovico went alone, making excuses for Francesco, who said he was detained. But the latter joined the party at the end of the supper, with many companions ; and scarcely had he entered the room when he traitorously drove a dagger into the breast of Ugolino, who fell half-dead, crying in vain for help to his other brother, who on the contrary finished the work of killing him with his own sword. Guido, who loved his children (for they were all his own sons), but especially Ugolino as the prop of his advanced years, felt this blow terribly.” For many days he remained

¹ Cf. L. P. Volta, *Compendio Cronologico della Storia di Mantova*, Lib. vi.

² Cf. Gionta, *op. cit.*

in doubt as to his action ; but finally decided to cover this tragic event with silence, and to make no further inquiry into the conduct of his sons. The body of the brave and valorous (*prode*) Ugolino was buried secretly, and his afflicted wife Caterina Visconti sent back to Milan.¹

Thus the foul and terrible crime seemed to have been successful ; the two brothers, Lodovico and Francesco, remained practically the rulers of the city ; the murmurs of the people were kept down by official approval—even the pardon of Holy Church extended to the murderers.² But there was yet the Visconti of Milan to be reckoned with. Bernabò Visconti, it has been said, displayed all the worst vices of his family : he taxed his unfortunate subjects unmercifully, he mutilated the peasants who had interfered with his hunting, he gave over State criminals to the most terrible and extended tortures.³ But here for once he had the right on his side. Hearing what had happened in Mantua, he bade his niece Caterina return to him in Milan, since he had the firm purpose of avenging Ugolino's death. For the moment he waited his time. Cansignorio della Scala, Lord of Verona, was no friend to these Gonzaghi, and now tried to stir up trouble between the two brothers by insinuating to Lodovico that he had better be on his guard, lest he too should lose his life, together

¹ *Vide* MS. Memoirs of Mantua, quoted by Volta. Equicola's account is almost identical. It would seem that eight hundred soldiers had been set by the conspirators to guard the square and staircase of the palace ; that Lodovico and Francesco employed Pietro de' Torelli, a friend and confidant of their father, to persuade him to forgive them what had been done, making him believe that the foul deed had happened in the rage of a quarrel, and to entrust to them the government of the city.

² For this pardon to the murderers the Bishop of Mantua obtained special authority from Pope Urban V, giving the brothers absolution according to the rites of the Church. The text lies before me : " Nos Ruffinus . . . Episcopus Mantuanus notum facimus omnibus . . . quod nobiles DD. Lodovicum e Francischum, fratres de Gonzaga, reatu homicidii per eosdom perpetrati in personam nobilis militis D. Ugolini de Gonzaga, eorum fratris, quod nobis in facie ecclesie fuerunt confessi . . . absolvimus, etc. Datum Mantuæ . . . Jul 1363. Pont. S^{mi}, D. Urbani pape." Comment on this document seems needless.

³ *Vide* Symonds, *Age of the Despots*, ch. iii., note. Bernabò kept five thousand boarhounds, which were quartered on his subjects, and a peasant who had killed a hare was given to the dogs to devour ; others, for poaching, had their eyes put out, hands cut off, or their houses burned. *Vide* Corio.

with the succession to Mantua ; next, he turned to Bernabò Visconti, and wrote to him “ that he did well to take vengeance against these Gonzaghi for the death of Ugolino, husband of his niece, and that he, Cane, would give him all aid in his power to achieve the destruction of the House of Gonzaga.”

Then Bernabò saw his chance, and, on Holy Thursday of 1368, made a sudden swoop into the Serraglio, capturing many castles and many prisoners ; and, pushing on from Guastalla, he encamped at Borgoforte, while his armed vessels from thence swept the Po, and drove before them, as far as Stellata, the hasty levies of the Estensi. But help came from without, through the great Emperor Charles IV, who brought about a settlement between the Visconti and Gonzaghi—one of the terms being the marriage of Lodovico's son Francesco to Agnese, daughter of Bernabò Visconti. In 1369 Francesco Gonzaga, brother of Lodovico, had died. He had no family, and after his death his wife, Lieta de' Polenta, went back to her family at Ravenna ; and in the same year died his father Guido Gonzaga, “ a man peaceful, quiet and modest (*uomo riposato, quieto, modesto*), religious, and above everything a faithful observer of his word given.”¹ Lodovico Gonzaga remained the only heir to the succession, and his election to the Captainship of Mantua took place on the 30th of March, 1370.

His first act, a prudent one, was to secure the city from hostile attack. He surrounded with walls the Corte Vecchia and the suburbs of S. Giorgio and Porto ; he repaired the fortifications of Castiglione Mantovano, Borgoforte, and Governolo. Governolo lay south of the city, near the junction of the Mincio and the Po ; Borgoforte was due west of this last, lying on the Po ; Castiglione Mantovano, about half-way between Mantua and Villafranca, held the northern frontier against the Scaligeri of Verona. There seems to be no doubt that Lodovico, third Captain of the People, when he came to power, showed himself a good ruler and a good financier. He freed Mantua from the debt incurred by his grandfather, Luigi, to Cangrande of Verona, during the wars of the Visconti—with the strong places of Castellaro and others

¹ *Vide* Equicola, *op. cit.* Lib. ii. Guido's brother Feltrino, as we have seen, had died in 1376. He had lost Reggio, and took this bitterly to heart.

given as pledge—by the payment of thirty thousand florins. For Mantua and her rulers were at this time already rich, while the rest of Italy was in a state of war and confusion ; the fertility of her soil, her commerce, her growing population, all promised well for the future, though they made her a prize to be coveted. At this very time (1380) came the wedding of the young Francesco to Agnese or Agnesina Visconti, to whom her father Bernabò gave a dowry of fifty thousand golden florins. Francesco was accompanied to Milan by a suite of noble Mantuans,¹ including his cousins Petronio, Azzo and Francesco Gonzaga, with his tutor Giovanni della Torre. The wedding was solemnized with great splendour ; and on the 15th of August he brought back to Mantua the young Agnese as his bride, “ covered with gold and gems, with an escort of the leading nobles of Milan.” On the medal which was then struck, in commemoration of the marriage, Francesco had united the Visconti serpent (*biscia*) with the arms of the Gonzaga.

Two years later (1382) his father Lodovico died of a tumour on the stomach, after suffering terribly from thirst. He had ruled the city for twelve years ; and his rule had been good, and himself generally praised for his liberal and upright conduct while in power. “ He loved very deeply Alda d’Este, his wife, from whom was born his son Francesco, and he was buried in S. Francesco in Mantua ” ; and, as this son Francesco was still under age, the Council of the Commune administered the government. The actual election of Francesco Gonzaga to be Captain-General and Lord of Mantua did not take place until 1388 ; and in the meantime an event occurred which was to influence profoundly the contemporary history of Northern Italy.

We have already seen in these pages the intimate connection and influence of the Visconti rulers of Milan upon the Gonzaghi and Mantua. In 1384 the plague had reappeared in that city, which became almost deserted ; and in the year following Gian Galeazzo Visconti, Conte di Vertù, by a clever ruse had trapped his uncle Bernabò in the Castle of Trezzo,

¹ Among Francesco’s suite were members of the Agnelli, Andreasi, and Donesmondi families, all great Mantuan houses—the first of whom, as I happen to know, still hold a good position in Italy.

and very soon afterwards had killed him.¹ Francesco Gonzaga, as we have seen, was now married to Agnese, the daughter of Bernabò; but in spite of this, Gian Galeazzo seems to have remained on good terms with the Gonzaga, and made treaties with Mantua in 1385, and again in 1388.

Into our story of Mantua, always a central pivot of politics in Northern Italy, there has now entered one of the most notable figures in all Italian history. Less directly cruel than Ezzelino, Gian Galeazzo Visconti was almost as merciless and far more intellectual; step by step his great power had been slowly built up, from the day when, under pretence of pilgrimage to Our Lady of Varese, he had thus entrapped his uncle Bernabò, and proclaimed himself Lord of Milan. In those days of fierce soldiers, he lacked the physical courage to lead his armies; but his ambition was as unmeasured as his intellectual capacity. The greatest Condottieri of the age were at the disposal of his immense resources; but of these men, it has been said, "he was himself the brain and moving principle." "I have seen," said Giovio, "in the chests of his archives marvellous books on sheepskin, which contained from year to year the names of the Captains, Condottieri, and old soldiers, and the payment of each one, and the roll of the cavalry and infantry"; and Symonds, commenting on this passage, remarks that he may be said to have applied the methods of a banker's office to the conduct of the State, and to have invented the later bureaucracy. His portrait, which I found among the Pisanello drawings in the Louvre, with his strong, coarse face and short beard, might belong, I have said, to a modern millionaire of Wall Street.² "False and pitiless," says Sismondi, "he joined to unmeasured ambition a personal timidity, which he did not endeavour to conceal.

¹ Stefano Visconti, the last of his family, had left three sons, Mateo, Bernabò, and Galeazzo, among whom the Visconti inheritance was divided. Matteo was assassinated (1355) by the other two brothers; and Galeazzo died in 1378, and was succeeded in his portion of the Visconti domain by his son, this Gian Galeazzo. There can be little doubt that Bernabò was scheming to get possession of the estate of this young Prince, who proved himself too clever for his uncle. *Vide* Symonds, *op. cit.* ch. iii. and the account in Corio.

² *Vide* Selwyn Brinton, "Humanism and Art," ch. i. (*Renaissance in Italian Art*, Part iv.)

But the vices of tyranny had not weakened his ability . . . his finances were always flourishing, his cities well garrisoned and victualled, his armies well paid.”¹

One by one the little lordships of Lombardy and Emilia had fallen into his grasp. From his armchair of Milan or Pavia he dictated schemes which should slowly absorb Verona (1387), Padua (1388), then Ferrara, Mantua, Bologna, perhaps even Florence herself—the great serpent of the Visconti sliming its prey by treachery and plot, ere it was absorbed into the Milanese Dukedom. Verona and Padua had been thus won by intrigue and armed plot, the Lord of Ferrara become a discredited tool of the Visconti; and now a yet darker scheme seems to have been planned to put Mantua into his hands. Francesco Gonzaga had remained faithful to his alliance with Milan, in spite of the efforts of the Carrara of Padua, of Ferrara, Venice and Florence to draw him into their League against the growing power of Milan; and even when, in February of 1391, the leagued armies of the Florentines, Venetians, and of Francesco Novello di Carrara and the Este entered the Mantovano to compel Francesco to join their league, he still avoided committing himself. He had married, as we have seen, Agnese Visconti, daughter of the dead Bernabò, and whose brother Carlo was now in arms against the Duke of Milan, so that there may have been a double reason for revenge in the tragedy which followed. For now “he” (Gian Galeazzo) “gave Francesco to understand that Agnese” (his wife) “held secret correspondence with her brothers to take away her husband’s life, and that letters would be found in her possession to prove this. The poor Princess was charged before the Podestà, tried, and condemned for adultery to be beheaded—the which was executed privately on the night of February 7, 1391.” Other accounts state that Francesco had for some months been living in constant suspicion of the faithlessness of his wife; that several arrests were made of members of the Court, and, Agnese having been confined to her own apartment, there followed the formal trial and sentence. Only one of the persons arrested, Vincenzo da Scandiano, was strangled in prison, as having been guilty of secret misconduct

¹ *Vide* Sismondi, *op. cit.* ch. iii.

with her ; and Francesco himself is said to have been “ so afflicted that for seven days he remained in his own room in grief (*sospirando*) without seeing anyone.”

The whole terrible story is wrapped in mystery, but we have to judge of Gian Galeazzo's hand in it by his record elsewhere.¹ When Volta gives as a reason against this that Francesco sent him a copy of the “ processo,” begging him to keep it private, and that this was used two years later by the Visconti as a pretext for war, this seems to me only to suggest yet more strongly that the whole thing was a trap to first ruin Francesco's reputation at home, and then invade and annex his territory. By the unhappy Agnese Francesco had a daughter, Alda, who was taken away by Alberto d'Este, and married in 1392 to Francesco da Carrara, that determined foe of the Visconti despot ; and Francesco Gonzaga soon after married again, and by his second wife, Margherita Malatesta da Rimini, had a son, Gian Francesco, who was born in 1395.

But already, in 1392, he had entered the League against the Visconti, and in this year of his son's birth (1395) had removed the Visconti serpent (“ biscione ”) from the Gonzaga arms, and commenced in Mantua the erection of the Castello near the Porta S. Giorgio, designed by the architect Bartolomeo of Novara, as well as the building of the great bridge which was to separate the middle and the lower lakes. Then the storm fell suddenly on Mantua. During the period of peace the Visconti had taken into his pay armed men from all parts of Italy, and, on a sudden, he sent a manifesto against Francesco Gonzaga, giving as his motive for this attack the unavenged death of Agnese. Then, on April of 1397, with Giacomo del Verme and Ugolotto Biancardo as their generals, his armies swept down upon Mantua by land and water, attacking Luzzara, Campitello, Suzzara and Borgoforte, and threatening to enter the Serraglio. From the first until late

¹ At Ferrara the Visconti Duke had roused the jealousy of Alberto, Marquis of Ferrara, against his nephew to such a pitch that he beheaded him together with his mother, burned his wife, and hanged a third member of his family ; while at Pisa a similar plot had placed that city in the Visconti hands ; in both these cases, as at Mantua, the great serpent slided over his prey before his direct and terrible attack. Francesco's later conduct (1392) suggests that he had discovered, too late, that he had been duped.



THE CASTELLO OF THE GONZAGA
SEEN FROM THE LAKE

in their dynasty the Gonzaghi were famous men of war ; and now Francesco, against terrible odds, was fighting for his life and his land. After a hurried council, he left to his own people the defence of the city, and with his kinsman Carlo Malatesta, a famous captain of that day, and many of his own people at his side, went forward to prevent the enemy from entering the Serraglio. He had as his allies the Florentines and the Bolognese, and the Lords of Padua, Ravenna, Rimini, Faenza, and Ferrara ; the opposing forces were evidently well matched, and the struggle—which was really for the lordship of all Italy—had the Mantovano for its battleground.

His allies were sending Francesco supplies when, to stop this, Del Verme burnt the bridge at Borgoforte, while the Visconti sent his general, Alberigo da Barbiano, as far south as Florence, to waste her territory, and keep her busy at home. That subtle brain, working at Milan behind his generals, had by now thought out his great scheme—to turn aside the waters of the Mincio, dry up the lakes of Mantua, and cut her off from Governolo ; and Biancardo, encamped beneath the very walls of the city, was trying now to carry this out. Francesco, finding himself attacked from all sides, sent Galeazzo Gonzaga to Venice, to beg the Senate for armed vessels to defend Governolo, held bravely by his kinsman Bartolomeo, and to free the Po of the enemy vessels which were besieging Borgoforte. For three months of constant hard fighting the Gonzaga, with Carlo Malatesta, held the Serraglio against the Ducal armies ; then, early in August (1397), a fleet of galleys and small ships appeared in the waters of the Po, and attacked the Duke's vessels, that "*superba e potente armata*," with such fury that more than a hundred were taken and the rest sunk. His general, del Verme, had to retire in haste, abandoning war material, baggage, and bombards ; and Malatesta with the Gonzaga, following him up, took six thousand foot and two thousand horsemen prisoners on St. Augustine's day, the 28th of August 1397. Negotiations for peace followed, and lasted through the winter ; and on May 11, 1398, a truce of ten years was concluded¹ between Gian Galeazzo and

¹ The terms of peace were that the Visconti should withdraw his troops, including those on the Brescian frontier, the navigation of the Po left free,

Francesco Gonzaga, who returned to his city in triumph, and is said to have spent 30,000 golden ducats on the rejoicings.

The storm had spent its force, and better days seemed in store for Mantua ; but in the year following, when the plague reappeared in Italy, Francesco lost his wife, Margherita Malatesta. It was this same pest which, in August 1403, caused the death of Gian Galeazzo Visconti—" rendering vain every judgment of his astrologers, without consulting whom neither in peace or war would he undertake any matter. For Poggio says they had promised securely the Kingdom of Italy. Oh ! wretched and credulous hopes of mortal man ! " ¹ It was a moment of strange exaltation and terror, when " from the mountains of Piedmont there descended (1399) people robed in white, who cried aloud ' Misericordia ' " ; but Italy now breathed again, delivered from a great peril—most of all, the Republic of Florence and Mantua, who had borne the brunt of the battle. Francesco Gonzaga had proved himself a great Captain ; and we are not surprised to find, in 1405, the Most Serene Republic of Venice offering him the post of Captain-General of her armies. As such he captured for that Republic (1405) Verona, driving out Jacopo da Carrara, and shortly afterwards Padua ; and thus with him commences that connection of the Gonzaghi with Venice, and that tradition which made them so often not alone Lords of Mantua but Condottieri of Milan, of the States, of the Church and the great Republics.

At home Francesco showed himself a patron of the arts, especially of architecture. We have seen that we owe to him that noble Castello, to be adorned in the next generation by the frescoes of Andrea Mantegna, which still frowns over the Porta S. Giorgio, and which is now being carefully and judiciously restored ; and to this time belong (1403) the Gothic façade of S. Pietro and (1405) that of the old Church of

and no strong forces kept in Borgoforte or Governolo. Corio adds, but without sufficient foundation, that the Visconti advanced the condition that Francesco should consider himself as his feudatory.

¹ *Vide Equicola, op. cit. Lib. ii.* We have seen how Ezzelino had the same belief in the astrologers he consulted, and Equicola, in his own time, notes the same of Lodovico Sforza and Federigo, King of Naples ; nor can there be much doubt that this Kingdom of Italy was at the back of the Visconti's ambitions and designs.

S. Andrea, as well as the beautiful campanile of this latter, which still survives, the first stone of which was laid in 1413.¹ Another beautiful Gothic building, dating from this earlier half of the fifteenth century, is the Palazzo dei Mercanti, still existing; and as a thank-offering from the plague of 1399, he had erected the pilgrimage church of S. Maria delle Grazie. A lover of good architecture, we are told Francesco called into his service architects and engineers, and paid them generously; grandiose in his projects, he might have done more had life been spared to him.

He is the last of the Captains-General of Mantua, for in 1403 he had been created by the Emperor Wenceslaus the first Marquis of Mantua; but finding this accompanied by the demand for money—of which this Emperor seems to have been always urgently in need—Francesco had made no immediate use of the patent.² Three years before his death he had undertaken to reform the Statutes of his city, aided by the best jurisconsults, directed by Fulgoso Piacentino; while under his rule the population had increased by one third. “He was a prince of no mean talents, a friend of the good, rigorous in the administration of justice”; as great in the arts of peace as we have seen him in war. When he died suddenly on March 17, 1407, in the forty-first year only of his life, he left to the Most Serene Republic of Venice the wardship of his young son and heir, Gian Francesco Gonzaga.

¹ We shall return to both these churches later, when we treat of the rebuilding of S. Andrea by Leo Battista Alberti and of S. Pietro by Giulio Romano; converting these fine earlier Gothic buildings into monuments of the Renaissance style. The beautiful monument of Margherita Malatesta, wife of Francesco, is now in S. Andrea, having been transferred there from S. Francesco when that church was turned into an arsenal: it was in the crypt of S. Andrea, but is now placed in a chapel of the left transept. The lovely recumbent figure of the Gonzaga Princess, her head slightly bent to the side, her hands clasped, may be compared with that noble monument of Doge Venier in SS. Giovanni e Paolo at Venice; for there is very good reason to suppose that Pietro Paolo delle Masegne was engaged on both these monuments, as well as on the old front of S. Pietro.

² This document, which gave him the right of declaring as heirs his illegitimate sons, if the legitimate issue failed, was confirmed by Pope Boniface IX in his Bull of December 31, 1404. This Emperor Wenceslaus was son of the great Charles IV, but of a very different character. Sismondi calls him “that indolent and sensual monarch”: he got 100,000 florins from Gian Galeazzo Visconti for creating him Duke of Milan.

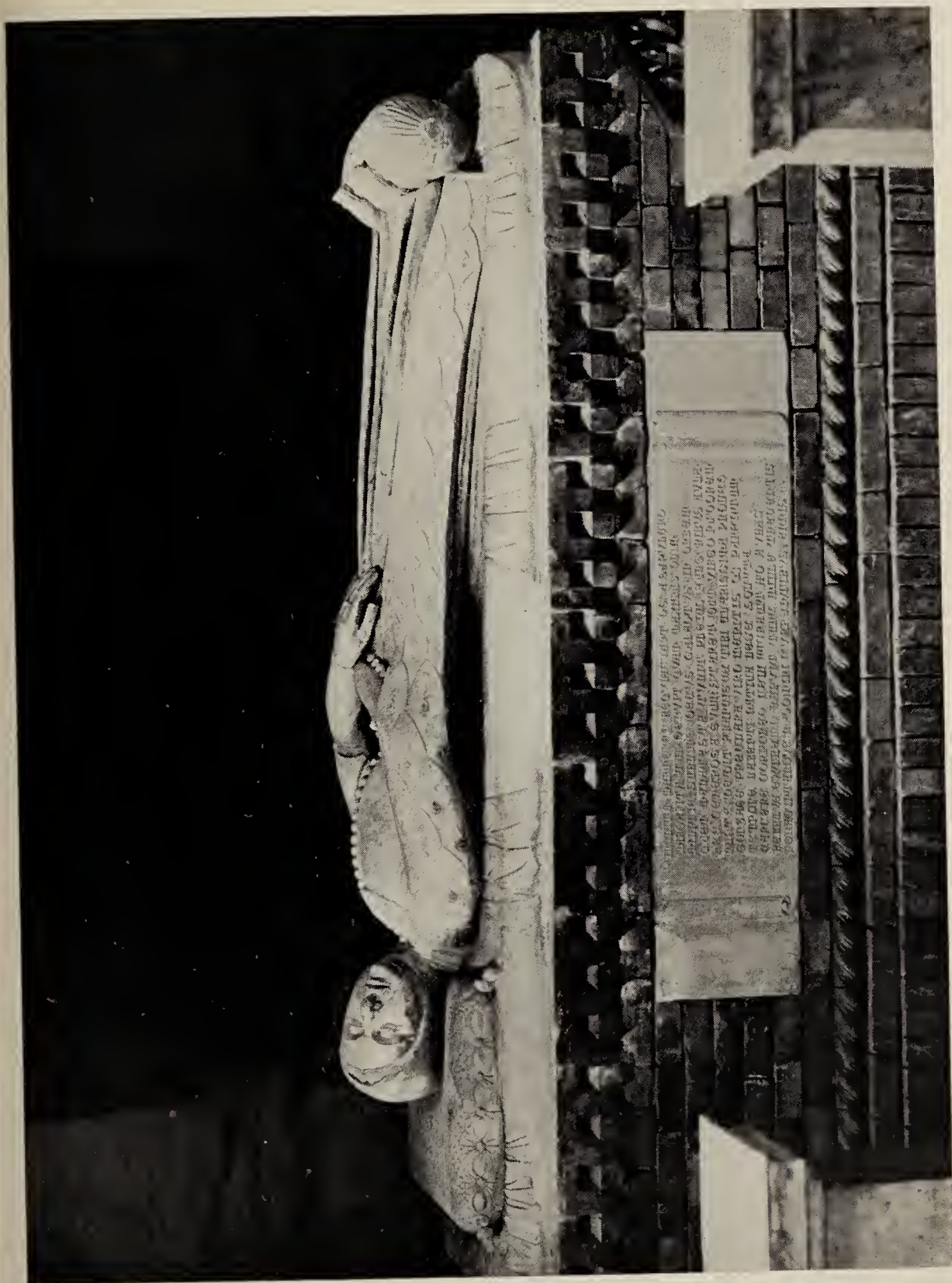
CHAPTER V

LODOVICO GONZAGA, MARQUIS OF MANTUA

THE death of Francesco and the succession of his son Gianfrancesco mark a new epoch in the relations of Casa Gonzaga with Mantua. There can be no doubt that, during the events recorded in my last chapter, the Visconti rulers were aiming at getting Mantua into their possession ; and the claim of suzerainty put forward by their own historians, and as persistently denied on the Mantuan side, goes to confirm this. The danger was a very real one, and reached its climax in the great onset of Gian Galeazzo ; with his death it passes for the present into the background.

On the other hand, the relations of the Gonzaghi to their city are now becoming more definite and stabilized. The little Gianfrancesco was barely twelve years old when he lost his father, but he showed already, we are told, talent and the desire to learn ; and when, in 1407, the Commune of Mantua assembled to arrange for the election of their new Captain—"after much deliberation it was decided, by the advice of Donato de' Preti, that a government by succession was better than one by election, and that, as the Senate of Venice was already the youth's guardian, his choice was practically assured." Thus the right of the Gonzaghi to succeed to the Lordship of Mantua was definitely secured, and on March 20th of this year Gianfrancesco was invested with the full powers of his late father ; but in consideration of his tender years, his uncle Carlo Malatesta—whom we have already found fighting beside Francesco in that great onset of the Visconti—was invited to take the reins of government beside the Podestà of the coming year, Bartolommeo of Perugia.

It was at this time, when the Malatesta was virtually ruling



MONUMENT OF MARGHERITA MALATESTA, WIFE OF FRANCESCO GONZAGA
 PROBABLY BY PIETRO PAOLO DELLE MASEGNE, NOW IN S. ANDREA AT MANTUA

the city, that the ancient statue of Virgil in the Piazza was thrown down—it is said by his orders—and destroyed ; an act of vandalism for which he has been justly blamed by subsequent scholars and historians. We are told that Carlo Malatesta saw with displeasure the custom of the Mantuans to crown with flowers every year, and dance and hold jousts (*giostre*) around this statue upon the 15th day of October ; and perhaps thought this cult of the Latin poet savoured of idolatry. “ The Malatesta did not understand,” says Equicola, “ that there are two kinds of veneration : the one which is due to God alone, the other to men of surpassing excellence ; and the most learned Paolo Vergerio complains that that furious, insane, and superstitious man wished to make war with statues.”¹ At the same time Carlo Malatesta arranged to marry the young Gianfrancesco into his own family, the lady selected being Paola, daughter of Pandolfo Malatesta of Rimini, then Lord of Brescia. If this was a good match for the lady, on her side she brought a dowry, both in money and lands of the Brescianino, adjoining those of Mantua. She was then sixteen years of age, beautiful, of good character and excellent mental qualities ; and the wedding was celebrated with splendour, and a great tournament, in which forty-two knights, all of the Gonzaga family, took part.

As Gianfrancesco became more practised in public affairs he ceased to have his uncle always at his side ; and in the year 1411 he entered, like his father, into the service of Venice, as her General against Sigismund, King of the Romans. Soon after this (1415) he was able to round off his territory on the Cremona side with Ostiano, Isola, and Rivarolo, and, after some resistance, also Viadana ; and later (1418) fought with courage beside Carlo Malatesta at the head of two thousand footmen and eight hundred knights against the famous Condottiere Braccio da Montone, Lord of Perugia ; returning,

¹ Vergerio, attacking the Malatesta, stated that the statue was broken in pieces by him and thrown into the Mincio. Volta says that it was one night removed by a certain Niccolo Napoletano, and never recovered, but that the head was found two centuries later, and came into the collection of Vespasiano, Duke of Sabbioneta. Thence it seems to have passed into the Museum of Antiquities of Mantua, in 1785 : most of the contents of this Museum have recently been transferred to the Reggia.

however, to Mantua to welcome Pope Martin V in February of 1419. In the meantime his son Lodovico, who was to be the second Marquis, had been born (1414), and the succession secured; and yet again we find Gianfrancesco fighting (1426) against Filippo Maria Visconti, now Lord of Milan—whose slippery and ambitious policy kept Northern Italy in constant war—when the Gonzaga held Peschiera and Viadana against the Milanese, and having returned to Mantua, after Brescia had fallen, covered with glory. But his greatest exploit was when, in this same year (October of 1426), he fought under the walls of Cremona against his uncle Carlo Malatesta, who remained his prisoner.¹ When peace with Milan was concluded, in March of 1428, the Venetian Senate expressed their thanks to Gianfrancesco, and gave him territory belonging to Asola—Remedetto, Vologno, Castelnovo—and further presented him with a magnificent palace in Venice, “so that, whenever he went to live in that city, he might have a worthy residence.”² Equicola gives this Prince the character of a spendthrift, and says that, imitating the bad example of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, it pleased him “to be more revered by his courtiers than was befitting, that he altered the frugal life, which in his youth was still the rule in Mantua, and commenced not alone to give, but to throw away, those riches acquired with such peril by his ancestors.” Yet he goes on to admit that “he was none the less in military matters a mighty warrior and a great Captain.” There was, however, one occasion when a magnificent display was justified and required. This was the visit of the Emperor Sigismund to Mantua in September of 1433, after he had been created Emperor in Rome on May 31 of that year. The Gonzaga had already paid him a visit at Parma, and received confirmation of the title of Marquis (bestowed already on his father) by a gift of twelve thousand golden florins; but now the formal confirmation of his title took place in Mantua,

¹ Carlo Malatesta had been taken into his service by Filippo Maria Visconti—“per porre in sospetto il Gonzaga, cognato del detto Carlo.”

² Cf. *Documenti in Archivio Segreto*, quoted by Volta. Carmagnola, who had also led the Venetians, had a very different fate; for being recalled to Venice, “he was publicly beheaded between the two columns, while the Gonzaga was honoured.” *Vide Equicola.*

when a throne richly adorned, with an altar in front, was erected in the Piazza di S. Pietro, around which the courtiers and magistrates of Mantua were grouped. On the 22nd of September the monarch, crowned and in his Imperial robes, and preceded by princes and knights of the Empire, entered the Piazza; and, after Mass duly said, Gianfrancesco was presented to Sigismund by two Princes of the Empire, and received from him the Marquisate, the mantle and the ring, while the four eagles with open wings were ceremonially added to the Gonzaga shield. Sigismund then called to himself Lodovico, the eldest son of the Marquis, to inform him that he destined for his bride his own niece Barbara, a daughter of the Marquis of Brandenburg, one of the Electors of the Empire. This great function ended with the ringing of bells, the blare of trumpets, and the acclamation of the people; while the Emperor, retiring to his apartments, there signed the diploma¹ which declared Gianfrancesco Prince of the Empire, and invested him with the Marquisate of Mantua. "In memory of this great day," writes Equicola, "may still be read in marble near the Tower of the Hours, towards the street, the following words: 'On the 16th day of August, 1328, the Magnificent Messer Luigi Gonzaga, ancestor of the illustrious Marquis Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, did make himself the Lord of Mantua . . . and the said Gianfrancesco, on the 22nd of September 1433, the Most Serene Sigismund IV did with his hands and mouth create and make Marquis of Mantua, upon a triumphal tribunal erected within the Piazza of S. Pietro in Mantua.'" Two days later the Emperor left with his suite for Trento and Germany; on the 12th November "arrived in Mantua the aforesaid Barbara of Brandenburg to be wife to Lodovico, and their splendid wedding continued for all the year the joy of the Mantuans."

In the year following these events (1434) the Senate of Venice confirmed Gianfrancesco as their Captain-General, with the offer to him of Crema and Gheradadda, if he could secure

¹ The original diploma is stated by Volta to be still preserved among the archives of Mantua. The costume worn by the Emperor seems to have been "a cope in the manner of a priest, on his head a crown of gold set with jewels"; and his sceptre was inscribed with the only three continents then known, Asia, Africa, and Europe.

these places in the name of the Republic ; and in 1435 he married his second son, Carlo, to Lucia d'Este, daughter of the Marquis of Ferrara. We have already seen among the dangers which threatened the Gonzaga dynasty that of dissensions within the family itself, and have traced this in the case of Feltrino, and in the next generation, in the terrible murder of Ugolino Gonzaga ; the same trouble was now to reappear in the acutest form in the family of Gianfrancesco. Himself a great captain of war, that Prince's affection had turned from his first-born, Lodovico, to his second son, Carlo, possibly from this latter's inclination to arms ; perhaps too the influence of the great Este family, into which Carlo had married—while Margherita Gonzaga, daughter of the Marquis, had been married in the year following (1435) to Lionello di Niccolo d'Este, Marquis of Ferrara—affected in some way his fair judgment.

In any case “there was very great jealousy between Lodovico and Carlo, which resulted in bitter feelings (*amari disgusti*) between the first-born son and his father.” Lodovico found himself being pushed out of his proper place in the family, while the fact of his wife having yet given him no child may have been also used against him ; being sent to Brescia he betook himself suddenly to Milan, and then and there entered the service of her Duke. The Marquis, his father, was frantic with rage at this step, which, of course, might have affected seriously his own position with the Senate of Venice. He proclaimed Lodovico an exile from all his dominions, went himself to the Emperor Sigismund, to obtain his permission to let his second son succeed him in the Marquisate ; and, in fact, brought back, in 1436, from Prague the diploma then given to him—“having no regard for Barbara of Brandenburg, who remained at Court exposed to the ill-will of her brother-in-law Carlo and to the impertinence (*alterigia*) of her kinswoman, Lucia d'Este.”

Meanwhile Lodovico had been fighting for Milan under the command of the famous Condottiere, Niccolo Piccinino ; but when this latter suffered defeat, in February of 1437, the Mantuan Prince remained with others prisoner of Francesco Sforza, General of the Florentines. On the other hand, in

September of the same year we find Gianfrancesco, his father, threatening to retire from the Venetian service, his place being taken by the Condottiere Gattamelata da Narni ; and his relations became so strained with Venice over this matter that the Marquis suddenly turned round to fight on the side of Milan, joining his armies to those of Piccinino against the Venetians, who now became his bitter enemies. But, though successful at first, he was defeated at Riva, and his much-favoured son Carlo taken prisoner by the Venetians, and carried to Verona ; where the Marquis himself met with another reverse from Francesco Sforza, was himself wounded, and lost many of his Mantuans. Returning thence to Milan, to confer with the Duke over their position, he found there his first-born son Lodovico, who, “repenting him of his past conduct, returned into the favour of his father, and went back with him to Mantua.” He returned, says Equicola, “to his country with the good favour of his father in 1440, with great rejoicings of all the city of Mantua, and of his mother above all others, who, seeing him come back with a beard, a thing rare in those times, in her astonishment told him that he seemed like a Turk” ; and this surname of “Turco,” taken up by his soldiers, seems to have kept its hold.

It was in the year 1442 that a son was at length born to Lodovico, to whom he gave the name of Federigo, in compliment to his godfather, the King of the Romans. Like his father, the Marquis Gianfrancesco was a builder, and to give work to his people—for the crops having failed, there was want then in Mantua—he completed the Rocca before the suburb of S. Giorgio, began the Carmine church, and made those arcades, which exist to our own day, though in some parts destroyed, from the Tower of the Hours to the end of the Piazza dell’ Erbe. Even greater was his service to the culture of the Humanists, in establishing in Mantua the Studio Publico, which almost rivalled the Universities of Bologna and Padua, when he had brought thither from Vicenza the famous teacher Vittorino da Feltre, to be the tutor to his own children. He was generous, as we have seen, almost to a fault, and in making his testament on September 23, 1444, he left to his servants and friends about two hundred thousand golden

scudi ; giving to his eldest son Lodovico the Marquisate of Mantua and all the Mantovano to the left of the Po and Oglio rivers, and to Carlo the lands beyond the Po to the west, including Isola, Dovarese, Rivarolo, Bozzolo, Sabbioneta, Luzzara, Suzzara, Gazzuolo, Viadana, and Reggiolo ; other fiefs he gave to his other sons, Alessandro and Gianlucido, and to his daughter Cecilia, who against his wish had entered a convent, a handsome portion. About a month later he died, being little over forty-nine years of age. He had felt, it is said, very deeply the loss of his dominions of Asola, Peschiera, and Lonato, though stomach trouble of old date was the cause of his death ; and we have seen in the case of his father, and shall find later, that rarely were these Gonzaghi long lived.

Lodovico now became (1445) Marquis of Mantua, and with him remained his brothers Alessandro and Gianlucido, who had embraced the ecclesiastical career. Carlo had decided to retire with his Este wife to Viadana, and soon after this entered the service of Venice against the Duke of Milan. His father had evidently tried in his later years to deal justly with his children, and to give back to his eldest son his proper place in the family ; but the seeds of injustice had been sown, the bad feeling between the two brothers remained, and was destined to bring forth bitter fruit in the future. In the meantime Lodovico “ did not neglect to give his attention to the good government of the city by causing her art, industry, and commerce to prosper.” He had just returned from a military expedition when he heard, to his deep sorrow, of the death of his beloved master, Vittorino da Feltre.

We are now entering upon that great period of Mantuan story when, under Lodovico and his immediate successors, the city became—like Florence of the Medici—a centre of the New Learning in Italy, of the culture and arts of the Renaissance ; nor could we find a better example of that new influence than this wonderful figure of the Humanist teacher, Vittorino de’ Rambaldoni da Feltre. Even under the regency of Carlo Malatesta this irradiation of culture had begun, and Poggio praises Gianfrancesco for his protection of literature, to whom indeed must be given the credit of having brought Vittorino to Mantua, and having placed his own children under his



SHIELD OF GONZAGA WITH PORTRAITS
(PERIOD OF LODOVICO II)



DETAIL OF PORTRAITS
IN THE REGGIA OF THE GONZAGA

guidance. "A villa, called Casa Zojosa, was allotted to the household, and a system of education commenced which deserved the admiration and fame it soon had gained. Besides the rich and noble youths who thronged to Vittorino, no less than sixty poor scholars were fed, clothed, and taught at his own expense. Plain living and high thinking was there the rule; diet and physical exercises—wrestling, fencing, swimming, riding—were carefully considered; the highest classic authors, Virgil and Homer, Cicero and Demosthenes, were revered as the supremest masters of style."¹ From the very first, besides his lodging and keep, there was assigned to Vittorino the fixed stipend of twenty scudi d'oro a month, to provide for all that he might need in his honourable but heavy duties. His house, La Giocosa or Zojosa, was in the neighbourhood of the Castello, near the Ponte S. Giorgio, where there were to be had the most delightful walks beside the lake, and very soon became the most famous school then existing in Italy.

Definitely here appears the wonderful Renaissance ideal of the complete man (*l'uomo universale*), developed on his every side—physical, intellectual, and spiritual; for the programme under this teacher included not only grammar and dialectic, the Latin and Greek tongues, but painting, music, dancing, gymnastic, the practice of riding and fencing. Pupils came there from all Italy, from France, Germany, and even Greece; all the children of the Mantuan Marquis—even the girls and the warlike Carlo—were thus educated, showing remarkable powers, and without exception adoring their high-souled teacher. Vittorino has been described as a man well lettered, full of religion, and adorned with the most charming manners; "but one of the rarest gifts in his beautiful character was that of humility, joined with contempt of riches—so that he always lived as one shy of praise (*schivo di lode*), and, remaining a poor man, employed all that he had in support of the needy, and his own wish was that his mortal remains should be buried without any inscription in the bare ground of the Church of

¹ Vide Selwyn Brinton, "Humanism in Art" (*The Renaissance in Italian Art*, Part iv.): "Maison Joyeuse"—"The Home of Gladness": what a message is given by its very name!

S. Spirito.” These directions were, however, with very natural feeling overruled by the Marquis Lodovico, who insisted upon honouring his beloved master with a most splendid funeral, at which he was present with his whole court ; and the influence which Vittorino had upon the whole movement of Humanism is witnessed by one of his Mantuan pupils, Prendilacqua, who, in his life of Vittorino,¹ after showing the different methods by which the Master led his pupils towards knowledge and “virtù,” mentions among these scholars Niccolo Perotto, Ognibene, Teodoro Gaza, Mario Filelfo, Antonio Beccaria, Lorenzo Volta and Federigo da Montefeltro, later to become Duke of Urbino.

One of his favourite pupils had been the young Gonzaga prince Gianlucido, who died in the year following that of the loss of his beloved Master. The contemporary accounts of his acquirements reveal a precocity which fairly takes our breath away. At the early age of twelve he had composed a Latin poem for the arrival in Mantua of the Emperor Sigismund, and at fourteen added two new propositions to Euclid. “He knew Virgil by heart, and could recite the books of the *Æneid*, taking a day for each ; and had he not been occupied by his father on the ‘Jus Civile’ our city would have had in him a second Virgil.” Such is the praise left him by a Mantuan who was his contemporary.² His inheritance passed, under his father’s will, to his brother Lodovico ; but trouble soon arose over this matter between Lodovico and Carlo—who had joined his forces with the Condottiere Francesco Sforza, now Lord of Cremona—and both brothers took up arms. Their mother, “the most pious Paola,” who had retired into a convent, felt bitterly this quarrel between her sons, and died in March of 1449 ; and two years later died her daughter, the beautiful and cultured Cecilia Gonzaga, whose pure and exquisite profile is preserved for us in a medal by Pisanello. “Very lovely,” I have said of this, “and wonderful in its reserve and sense of spacing, inscribed ‘*Opus Pisani Pictoris 1447.*’”³ Cecilia had studied Greek and Latin in the school of

¹ *De Vita Victorini Feltrensis dialogus Patavii*, 1774.

² *Vide* Prendilacqua, *op. cit.*

³ *Vide* Selwyn Brinton, “Humanism and Art.” Analysis : “Vittore Pisano.”

Vittorino, where she was able to write in Greek and to recite the finest passages of Virgil and Cicero ; but she had refused to accept a distasteful marriage, and had entered the Convent of S. Paola, “ where she lived for thirty years under the name of Suora Chiara, and dying left to her sisters a sweet and bitter remembrance of a holy life.” ¹

The storm which now broke was almost inevitable, for it was to be expected that Carlo Gonzaga, ambitious, quarrelsome, and left by his father with a large portion of Mantuan territory, would endeavour to grasp the whole ; but this struggle, in its result, became closely involved in the larger contest for dominion in North Italy between Venice and Milan. We have traced in the preceding chapter the effort of Gian Galeazzo Visconti to acquire nothing less than the kingdom of Italy. His successor, Filippo Maria, third Duke of Milan, with his father’s immense ambition, but without his political genius or constancy of purpose, kept his armies and Condottieri constantly in the field ; but thwarted them as constantly by his changes of policy. On the other hand, Venice had embarked on that career of mainland expansion which was to prove so fatal to her best interests,² and inevitably brought her into conflict with Milan. Mantua, between these two opposing forces, and exposed to attack from either, trimmed her policy as her Gonzaga Princes took service as Condottieri under the great Serpent of Milan or the Gonfalone of S. Marco.

Meanwhile the sudden death of Filippo Maria, in August of 1447, without a successor had brought back to life the old Republic of Milan ; and Carlo Gonzaga had taken the side of its free citizens against Francesco Sforza, who, married to Bianca, natural daughter of Filippo Maria, threatened their new-born liberty. But “ unstable in his thoughts,” he now betrayed Lodi and Crema to the Sforza, and received as his reward the city of Tortona. On February 26, 1450, after a short but terrible siege, Francesco Sforza became Lord of Milan, “ largely,” we are told, “ through the help

¹ Cecilia had refused to marry Oddantonio de’ Montefeltro, in spite of her father’s strong pressure and even violent threats ; and finally, with the support of her beloved Master Vittorino, obtained permission to enter this convent founded by her mother.

² *Vide* Selwyn Brinton, *Venice, Past and Present*, ch. iii.

of Carlo Gonzaga ” ;¹ and after being proclaimed as Duke had left to Carlo Gonzaga the government of the city, confirming him in the Lordship of Tortona. But the Sforza, anxious evidently to consolidate his newly won position, now sought for friendly relations with Mantua, and had actually entered into negotiations with Lodovico, proposing the marriage of his eldest son, Galeazzo Maria, with Susanna, daughter of the Marquis ; and Carlo Gonzaga coming to hear of this, jealous and angry, “ set on the Venetians to renew the war.”

The new Duke of Milan, discovering these doings, ordered the arrest of Carlo, who was imprisoned in November of 1450. At the request of his brother Lodovico, he was released, under the conditions that he should give up Tortona, pay the Sforza 60,000 golden florins, and quit the territory of Milan and Mantua ; but, being once freed, he broke faith and escaped, by way of Genoa, to Venice, and there came to terms with her Senate, full of bitter feeling against his brother. He evidently obtained a high command in the Venetian armies against Milan, led by the famous Condottiere, Jacopo Piccinino ; and in 1453 descended from the Veronese with three thousand horse and five hundred foot, resolved to recover his possessions. In a great battle at Villabona, which lasted five hours and cost Venice more than a thousand of her knights and six of her leaders of squadrons, Carlo Gonzaga was defeated by the Marquis Lodovico, and fled to Ferrara, to the parents of his first wife, Lucia d’Este. The Venetians withdrew their support from him when peace was finally concluded (1454) between Milan and Venice, who remained in possession of Asola, Peschiera, and Lonato ; and the Sforza, who had married Bianca Maria Visconti, coming to Mantua with his wife, was received with great rejoicings on the vigil of Christmas 1454.

Carlo Gonzaga remained at Ferrara “ wrapped in gloomy thoughts at not having recovered from the Marquis his lost possessions, and owing a large sum of money, which he was unable to pay ; and, becoming infirm, he ended his life by a fluxion of blood on December 21, 1456.” His body was brought back to Mantua and buried before S. Maria delle Grazie ; he

¹ Cf. Volta, *op. cit.*, “ Principalmente per opera di Carlo Gonzaga.”

left a widow with one son and three daughters, for whom Marquis Lodovico made provision, and gave them a palace near the Torre della Gabbia.¹ Carlo Gonzaga was evidently a man of powerful physique "*huomo di membra robusto*," and, says the chronicler, "was in point of talent and military valour, if not superior, at least equal to the Marquis, his brother; he was a friend and protector of learned men, himself a lover of good studies, high-spirited and liberal to his friends. But these fine qualities became shadowed by his ambition, his inconstancy and, above all, his deep-seated hatred towards his brother."

The duel within Casa Gonzaga itself had been short and terrible, ending thus dramatically with the death of the vanquished; and the same danger was not to reappear for many generations. The lesson of its presence seems to have been taken to heart, and, like the Medici at Florence,² the Gonzaga princes guarded against it in future by generally putting the second son into the Church, and then working to get him the red hat of a Cardinal, which opened yet wider vistas beyond; so that from this time a long series of Gonzaga Cardinals—among whom there towers above all that noble churchman and ruler, Cardinal Ercole, the beloved son of Isabella d'Este—come down through the pages of our story.

Meanwhile a terrible disaster to civilization, from which we suffer even now in its consequences, had befallen Christendom in the capture of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turk. Venice, exhausted by her long wars on the mainland, had been unable to give effectual assistance: but the great Humanist scholar, Æneas Sylvius Piccolomini, now became Pope under the title of Pius II., recognized the pressing danger, and summoned a Council to rouse Christendom against this terrible enemy. Mantua was the city chosen by him for this Council, and leaving Rome in January of 1459 he was at Bologna in

¹ This Torre della Gabbia still exists, with the terrible cage (*gabbia*) in which criminals were hung in mid-air. The locality sounds ominous, and might have served as a gentle warning.

² Lorenzo de' Medici, with wise forethought, placed his second son Giovanni in the Church at seven years of age, and he became a Cardinal in 1492—when he cannot have been much more than seventeen—to become later the famous Pope Leo X. See my *Golden Age of the Medici*, ch. x.

May ; and then, escorted in a magnificent bucentaur as far as Revere by the Duke of Ferrara, he made his solemn entry on the 27th of that month into Mantua by Porta Pradella, and went thence to her Cathedral of San Pietro. This public entry must have been a magnificent and inspiring spectacle. It was estimated that that day in Mantua there were more than a hundred and fifty thousand persons. Twenty-six Cardinals had accompanied the Pope, each bringing with him sometimes ninety, one hundred and fifty, even three hundred horsemen ; among them were the Cardinals Bessarion, Pietro Barbo (later to become Paul II), Borgia, to be only too well known later as Alexander VI, and the Ambassadors of Savoy, Burgundy, France, Poland, and the Dukes of Milan, Schwerin and the Marquis of Nuremberg. The Sessions were opened by a Latin oration, delivered by the famous Humanist and scholar Francesco Filelfo, and were continued every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in the great hall of the Palazzo di Corte. The Council, after securing the promise from different Christian powers for help against the Infidel, was closed by Pius II early in January of 1460 ; and the Pope himself left Mantua that month, celebrating on his way Mass at the pilgrim church of S. Maria delle Grazie, and travelling by the Mincio Canal into the Po, with eight of his Cardinals, in a rich bucentaur on his way to Ferrara ; with twenty-eight small boats filled by his suite, and being escorted as far as Stellata by Lodovico Gonzaga and the Marchesa Barbara.

Two years later (1462) there was another great public function when—following the policy I have noticed—Francesco, second son of the Marquis, became Cardinal at the early age of seventeen, while still completing his studies at the University of Pavia. His elder brother, Federigo, hurried to Pavia with an escort, and conducted him to Milan. Then there followed his public entry into Mantua by Porta Pradella, on January 2, 1462, with three hundred gentlemen at the young Prince's side, amid the enthusiastic acclamations of the people. For this was the first Cardinal of Mantua, and the delighted Marquis sent Baldassare Castiglione ¹ to Rome to convey his thanks to the

¹ Not, however, the famous author of the *Cortegiano*, who will come into our story later.

Pope for the honour shown to Casa Gonzaga, and went there himself soon after, accompanied by his third son, Gianfrancesco.

Following the example of his own union with a German Princess, which had in the end turned out so happily, the Marquis Lodovico had set his heart upon a marriage between his eldest son Federigo and the daughter of the Duke of Bavaria ; but he encountered strong and apparently unexpected opposition to the match from the young Federigo himself, who (we are told) was already enamoured of a young girl of humble condition, and made it clear that he was not disposed to fall in with his father's wishes. On hearing this Lodovico fell into such a passion that he finally took the resolve of imprisoning his own son ; but the mother—to give time for her husband's wrath to abate, and also perhaps to distract her son from an ill-conceived passion—sought to withdraw him from the immediate danger by making his escape from Mantua. Federigo left with six of his servants, and made his way to Naples, where he arrived in great straits, having been robbed on the way by a band of thieves. “ Being unwilling, through fear of his father, to make himself known, he suffered great distress, through the which cause the said Federigo fell sick of dysentery (*un flusso di corpo*).

“ Meanwhile his servants, having no means of livelihood, nor any trade or art, gave themselves to rough work such as is done by porters ; and with their small earnings supported their lord, whom they kept secretly in the house of a poor woman, where they themselves too had lodging.

“ The Marchesana had meantime sent messengers into different cities and countries to recover her son ; nor could she ever obtain any news, so that she came to think he was dead, since she could hear nothing of him, nor even of his servants. Now it so happened that one of these messengers came to Naples, and presented himself there to the King, with letters from the aforesaid lady Marchioness, who prayed that he should search through all his territory if there were therein seven men of a company, and gave thereto an exact account of their names, stature, and appearance.

“ Then the King gave orders that search should be forthwith made by the heads of the ‘ Contrade ’ (quarters of the

city), and one of these said that in his contrada there were six men of Lombardy, since he knew nought of Federigo, who lay sick at home, but that they were ' facchini ' (porters) and men of low estate. Yet did the King will to see them ; and when they came before him asked who they were, and what was their number. And they gave answer they were six men of Lombardy, since they wished not to make known their Lord ; and when their names were asked, they had changed them of purpose, so that the King, unable to discover anything, would have sent them away. But the messenger of the Marchesana had recognized them, and whispered to the King—' My Lord, these be the servants of her who sent me to thee ; but they have changed their names.'

" Then the King having separated them one from the other, took each apart, and questioned him of his Lord ; and they, finding themselves thus separate, told him all their story in every detail. Then the King sent for Federigo, whom he found upon a bed of straw grievously sick, and had him carried to his palace and tended with every care ; and sent the messenger back to his mother, to tell her how the men were found and in what misery they had been.

" Forthwith the Marchesana went to her husband, and, throwing herself at his feet, sought of him a favour. The Marquis answered that he would grant her all and every favour, however great—save only that it concerned not Federigo. Then did the Lady open to him that letter of the King of Naples, the which had such power that it softened the spirit of the Marquis when he heard in what wretchedness his son had been ; and handing back the letter to the Marchioness he said to her : ' Do as you think fit.'

" Immediately the Marchioness sent money, and good raiment, with strict orders that he (Federigo) should return to Mantua ; and he arriving there, threw himself at his father's feet, begging pardon for himself and his servants. That pardon was granted, and to the servants withal was given such means as to enable them henceforth to live honourably as gentlemen—and they were called the ' Faithful Ones ' (*li Fedeli*) of the House of Gonzaga, and from them the family of the Fedeli of Mantua draws its origin.

“ Then the Marquis, not to break his word given, willed that Federigo should take to wife the aforesaid Margherita, daughter of the Duke of Bavaria, and the wedding was duly celebrated ; so that father and son remained henceforth in the best of terms.” ¹

I have given in detail this quaint and charming story, which from the *Fioretto* of the old Mantuan chronicler reads like a mediæval fairy tale, because it has for us a special and unique interest in two directions. One is, in my judgment, the light which it throws upon that beautiful character, Barbara of Brandenburg—on her mother’s affection, her difficult position between an angry father and their errant child. We have seen and sympathized with her position when, still a young girl, almost a child (for she cannot have been much more than twelve when she left her northern home for Italy), she was left alone in a strange Court, deprived of her husband’s support among hostile relatives. She, too, had been a pupil of that great and good scholar Vittorino, who had instructed her in Latin ; and she may have found in these days strength for her young soul in the message of past wisdom. Later, she fully shared in her husband’s love for art and letters, and had helped herself to bring the new message of the Renaissance to the north by her cultural relations with the members of her family—her father, her sister, married to the King of Denmark, and her two daughters, married in Germany.

What happiness must have been hers when, in 1463, she saw her eldest son at length married to Margaret, daughter of the Duke of Bavaria. An escort of one hundred and sixty knights had gone thither, led by his younger brothers Gianfrancesco and Ridolfo, to conduct the “ Sposa ” south ; and on the 3rd of June she arrived at the palace of Belfiore, without Porta Pradella. “ The Princess, a girl of eighteen years, fair of presence and of gentle manners, made her solemn entry into Mantua on the day following amid universal rejoicings, accompanied by her husband Federigo, by the Marquis

¹ *Vide* Stefano Gionta, *op. cit.* It is fair to add that the legend of Federigo’s flight and return is omitted by Equicola. On the other hand, it appears in Volta and Zucchi (mem. MSS. *Delle Famiglie di Mantua*), and is too interesting and important to be overlooked.

Lodovico, by Galeazzo, son of the Duke of Milan, and noble Venetians, Florentines, Sienese, Lucchesi, Bolognesi, and other knights—some four thousand mounted men following the procession. Then commenced tournaments and dances in the most crowded parts of the city, which resounded with festive cries and concerts of music, and for many days tables were dressed not only in the cortile of the Palazzo de Corte, but in all the public squares, where there was food and drink for every one.”¹

And the Marquis Lodovico had planned to provide a beautiful home for Federigo and his northern bride. The Castello di Corte was adorned in its different apartments; but above all in that intended for the “Sposi,” which is said “to have presented the very ideal of a noble and magnificent palace (*Reggia*). To achieve this, the Marquis had brought together from many parts artisans, tapestry weavers of the best taste, and had provided a good sum of money, so that nothing should be wanted to a marriage honoured by a gathering of great personages without.” Above all, he had called to his help his own Court painter, to decorate the special apartment—still known as the “Sala degli Sposi”—which was to be occupied by Federigo and Margherita, with a series of paintings which should illustrate the story of Casa Gonzaga in this very time, including, as I would here suggest, the sequel to the story I have just narrated. Here, in a room of the old Castello, which still frowns over the Mantuan lake, the great Andrea Mantegna, at the full of his power, put forth all his strength in the magnificent series of frescoes which still survive, and which I shall treat in detail in the succeeding chapter.

¹ Cf. Volta, *op. cit.*

CHAPTER VI

MANTEGNA AT MANTUA

BORN in 1431, Andrea Mantegna had been trained at the Paduan School of Squarcione. In the frescoes of the Eremitani Chapel in that city his work is beside that of his teacher and foster-father ; but very soon the young eagle had soared far above his fellow-pupils, and even his teacher himself. “ He is above all,” I have written of him elsewhere,¹ “ the master of perfect line . . . the qualities of his genius are essentially strong, earnest, and virile. In his splendid science he disdains mere prettiness ; he seems to us sometimes cold (like those antique marbles he so loved), sometimes even stern and hard ; yet those who have ever felt his fascination will not willingly, I believe, turn from him to any other Master of any time.”

As early as the year 1456, Lodovico Gonzaga had approached the Master, then still at Padua, with the proposal that he should visit Mantua, and give his advice on the decorations of the chapel in his Castello. It was not probably until four years later (1460) that Mantegna actually entered the service of the Gonzaga at Mantua, and there is reason to suppose that he may have painted for the chapel of their Castello, as its altar-piece, the beautiful triptych now in the Uffizi Gallery at Florence ; while another work, now at Madrid—which represents the dead Virgin surrounded by the mourning Apostles, with, in the distance seen through a window, a delightful view of the Lago Inferiore of Mantua, traversed by the Ponte S. Giorgio as it then was—probably dates from

¹ *Vide* Selwyn Brinton, “ Humanism and Art,” ch. i. (*The Renaissance in Italian Art*, Part iv.)

the same period of Mantegna's residence at the Mantuan Court.¹

Mantegna was now settled at Mantua as the Court painter of the Gonzaga, with a house of his own and a fixed salary—though this latter was not infrequently in arrears. In 1466 he was at Florence on business for his patron, in 1467 at Pisa, and not long after this (perhaps in 1469) he must have commenced his frescoes of the Sala degli Sposi within the Castello of Mantua. We have noticed that it was Francesco Gonzaga, fourth Captain-General of Mantua, who had built this Castello di Corte, which was occupied from 1450 by Lodovico and his Marchesa, Barbara of Brandenburg; and here, as I have said, in a room looking out over the lake, Mantegna put forth his strength in a magnificent series of frescoes which still survive. The very first to meet our eye is that above the chimney, which, I am disposed to suggest, may represent no other subject than the return of Federigo to his father, after the flight to Naples, whose story I have just narrated.²

The old Marquis Lodovico is seated holding in his left hand a letter—if the subject is as I have suggested—not improbably that which his wife had received from the King of Naples. He turns back to whisper some order to his secretary Ascanio; and on his left is seated the Marchesa, with her younger children Lodovico, Dorothea, and Paola about her knees—a figure full of splendid matronly dignity, who watches her husband guardedly, as if anxious (we may think) as to the result of this first meeting between the angry parent and the fugitive son. Behind her are grouped her other children, the Cardinal Francesco, and Gianfrancesco, with pages, courtiers, scholars; and it is perhaps Federigo who enters the reception room up

¹ This grandly designed panel seems to have been sold later by Duke Vincenzo to Charles I of England, and to have been bought on that King's death by the Spanish Ambassador.

² Maud Cruttwell, in her *Life of Mantegna*, sees in this only the reception of an ambassador; this view is quite possible, though of lesser interest to our story of the Gonzaghi, and it is fair to add that other authorities seem to give some support to this. In that case it might be the reception by Lodovico (as Signor Pacchioni suggests) of the Papal Brief, conveying a Cardinal's hat on his second son, whom we shall find elsewhere in these frescoes; but is it likely, I may ask, that in a room destined for Federigo and his bride, practically the whole of the frescoes should refer to his younger brother?



DEATH OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

WITH LAKE AND BRIDGE OF S. GIORGIO BEHIND

FROM THE PAINTING BY ANDREA MANTEGNA IN THE MUSEO DEL PRADO, MADRID

the steps on the left, as if still uncertain of what welcome he might receive from that seated figure of the Marquis, with his long robes of state and strong, stern face.¹ This fresco, still in fair condition—having been judiciously restored in 1877—and of supreme interest in our story of the Gonzaga, I consider to certainly connect itself, either directly or indirectly, with the marriage of Federigo, for whose use and enjoyment these rooms were specially decorated.

On the next wall we see depicted the "Return from the Chase." Two servants hold horses and great white boar-hounds in leash. In the distance are seen two castles perched upon the rocks, and another in process of building—perhaps some hunting seat of the Gonzaga, such as Goito, which in 1463 Mantegna helped to decorate. The third wall shows the Marquis Gonzaga, in hunting dress, meeting his second son, Cardinal Francesco, on the latter's return from Rome. Here there can be no doubt as to the subject; and again the fresco is filled with most interesting contemporary portraits. The Marquis Lodovico himself, his son the young Cardinal, his daughter Dorothea, his fourth son the young Protonotary Apostolic Lodovico, later to become Bishop of Mantua, and their still younger nephew Sigismondo, are all here.² Federigo's little son, Francesco Gonzaga, even appears here in the front of the picture immediately before the Cardinal—his bushy hair and protruding brow already noticeable as a child—a figure who will enter our story very shortly, as husband of the brilliant Isabella d'Este and Marquis of Mantua; while the walled city in the background probably represents Rome, from which city the Cardinal was then returning, with her towers, the ruins of her Coliseum, and the Pyramid of Cestius.

The two other walls of this Sala seem to have been painted

¹ This figure advancing up the steps Signor Pacchioni refers to the Cardinal's recent preferment. The young girl kneeling on the right of the Marchesa I take to be Dorothea Gonzaga, to be married later unhappily to Galeazzo Sforza, and the boy standing behind her to be Gianfrancesco, the third son; while the handsome old man with white hair behind these is held to be Bartolo Manfredi, creator of the famous clock in the Piazza Erbe, and the young girl in gold brocade, standing behind the little dwarf woman, to be Margaret herself, bride of Federigo. This last is, however, only a guess.

² Signor Pacchioni finds here in the group nearest the window Andrea Mantegna himself, seen almost full face, near the profile figure of Federigo.

to represent tapestry. But in the centre of the roof is depicted a circular balcony, from which women and little winged "putti" or cherubs (the Moorish woman is to be noticed here) look down, and a peacock suns his brilliant plumage; while above these is seen the blue sky and clouds. Never has Andrea exceeded the "maestria" and daring perspective of this ceiling fresco. Here he definitely reveals himself as the precursor of Correggio; and scarcely less so in that delightful group of "putti," with butterfly wings, who uphold in the space above the door a tablet with the dedication by the artist to his patron and patroness, and the date of the work:

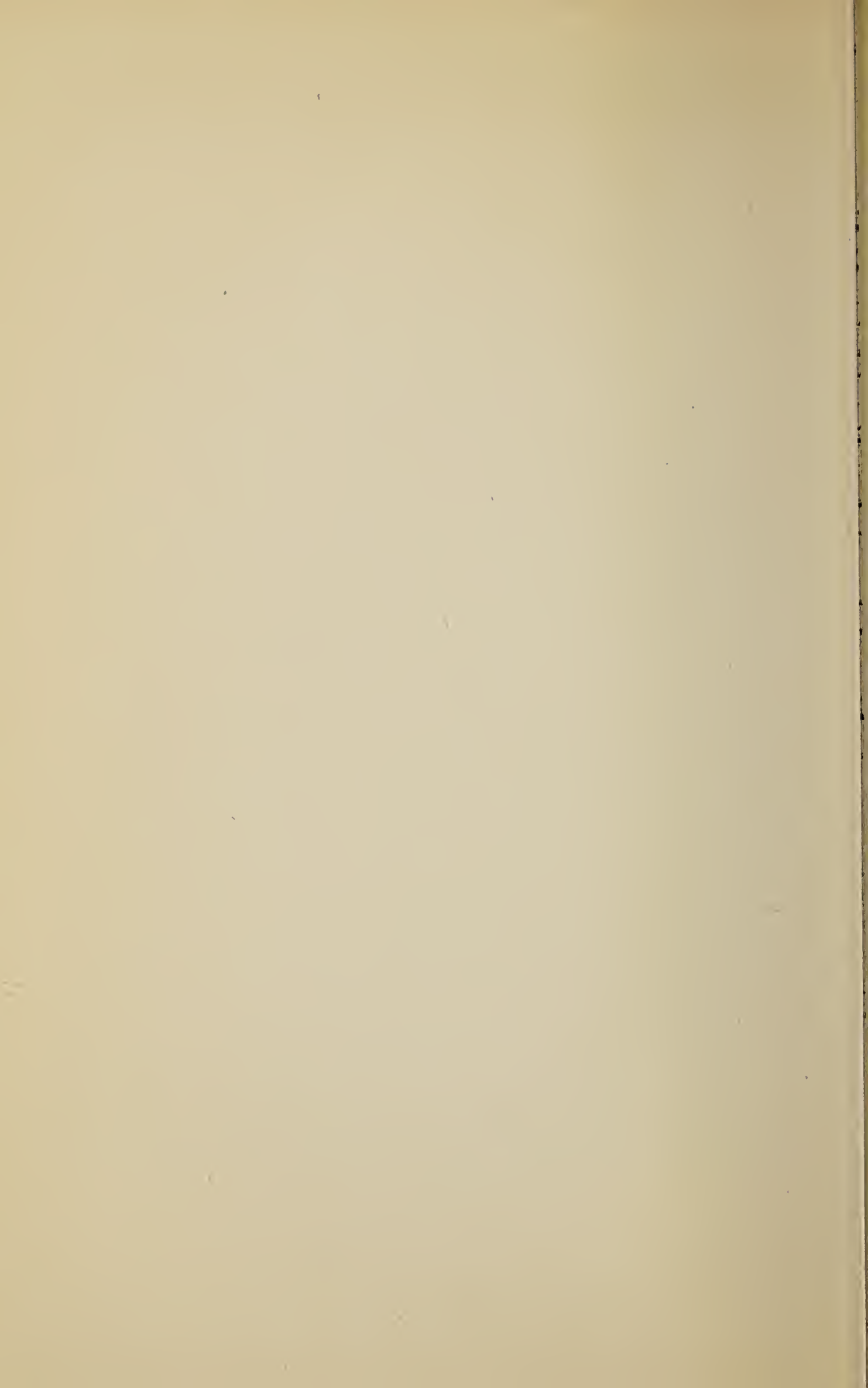
ILL. LODOVICO II MM
 PRINCIPI OPTIMO AC
 FIDE INVICTISSIMO
 ET ILL. BARBARAE EJUS
 CONJUGI MULIERUM GLOR.
 INCOMPARABILI
 SUUS ANDREAS MANTINIA
 PATAVUS HOC OPUS TENUE
 AD EORU DECUS ABSOLVIT
 ANNO MCCCCLXXIIII.

We see here that this great work—which alone is worth a special visit to Mantua, taking its place in Italian art beside the Library of Siena, the Sala del Cambio at Perugia and almost beside Raffaello's "Stanze" at Rome—was completed by Mantegna in 1474, to the glory both of Mantua and his Gonzaghi patrons. Lodovico was one of the most cultured princes of his House. We have seen that he had been a pupil of the great Humanistic scholar Vittorino; and amid all the cares of war and State in his later life, as a ruler of Mantua and captain of the armies of Milan, he never forgot his love of classic culture. He collected the manuscripts of Virgil, and employed artists to illustrate the *Æneid* and *Divina Commedia*, for Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio shared his interest with the classics. A printing press was set up with his approval at Mantua, Boccaccio's *Decameron* being printed there in 1473; and when the German printers, George and Paul Butzbach, arrived in 1472 to open their printing press, they found they were already forestalled by the Mantuan



LODOVICO GONZAGA WITH HIS FAMILY

FROM THE FRESCO BY ANDREA MANTEGNA IN THE SALA DEGLI SPOSI OF CASTELLO



Pietro de' Micheli, who calls himself, with honest pride in his edition of the *Decameron* just mentioned, "Primus Mantuae Imprimendi Auctor."

Lodovico's love for art and letters was fully shared by his second son, Cardinal Francesco, who had soon become an enthusiastic antiquarian and connoisseur in art of every form. On his journey from Rome, in 1472, he writes to his father from Porretta in the mountains, begging that Mantegna and Malagista, the musician, may be sent to him. "It will be a great pleasure to show Andrea my cameos and bronzes and other fine antiques, which we can examine and discuss together; and Malagista's playing and singing will make it easier for me to keep awake."¹ The two artists were sent, in fact, to join Francesco Gonzaga at Bologna; and, on 24th August of 1472, the young Cardinal Legate made his solemn entry into Mantua, bringing, beside these two, in his train Leo Battista Alberti and Angelo Poliziano, the Florentine poet, whose brilliant "Orfeo" was first performed in Mantua on this occasion. This is, without doubt, the scene which Mantegna commemorated in the meeting between father and son in the "Camera degli Sposi"; and Alberti and Poliziano are probably both in the group behind the Cardinal. The "Orfeo," a brilliant improvisation, was composed by Poliziano when he was still only eighteen, within forty-eight hours, for these celebrations of the return of Cardinal Francesco to Mantua. It is quite short, numbering less than five hundred lines; and the musical accompaniment must have helped and blended with the melodious beauty of its verses. We can picture the scene in that brilliant Mantuan Court of the Gonzaghi, when, singing to the viol, Messer Baccio Ugolino is said to have come forward in the part of Orpheus.² The Cardinal had brought back with him, besides Alberti and Poliziano, "picked up on the journey," the famous scholar and mystic, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. All these men were intimates of that brilliant circle of Lorenzo the Magnificent at Florence, and their presence at this time at Mantua brought together the two cities of Renaissance culture.

¹ Cf. *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua*, by Julia Cartwright.

² Vide my account of this "Orfeo" in *The Golden Age of the Medici*, ch. ix.

Leo Battista Alberti himself was at this time a frequent and welcome visitor in this cultured Mantuan Court. He fulfils that ideal of the Renaissance of which I have spoken. "He is the complete man (*l'uomo universale*), with his physical and mental powers in perfect balance. His Latin prose is a marvel of elegance, civil and canon law are known to him, physics and mathematics his favourite study ; yet his strength is such that he can spring over a man's head when upright, can make a coin from his hand ring against the Cathedral roof, and tame the fiercest horses—for in riding he sought to excel. . . . His painting and modelling (yet note that noble medallion of himself by his own hand) is an exercise by the way ; his great significance in architecture is scarcely mentioned by his biographer." ¹

Yet how great Alberti was as an architect we can realize when we come to Mantua. We have already had occasion to notice (Chapter I.) the great Church of S. Andrea, whose beautiful Gothic campanile of red brick still remains ; but the Basilica itself was rebuilt in its present form, at the command of Lodovico Gonzaga, from the designs of Leo Battista Alberti, and in this work, put in hand in 1472, the Marquis took the keenest interest and delight, urging by edict the Mantuans to come forward with spontaneous offerings for its execution, "the which from its vast size and noble simplicity should be superior to any building of the kind in the leading cities of Italy, and worthy to stand beside the magnificence of Rome herself." The great nave was constructed between 1472 and 1494 ; but the two sides of the Latin cross which is its design, with the crypt and presbytery, were added between 1597 and 1600 by the brilliant Ducal architect, Anton Maria Viani ; and the cupola itself, by the great Baroque Master Juvara, architect of the Superga above Turin, was not finished until 1782. So that the great Basilica came to possess much later and not entirely harmonious elements ; and Venturi justly remarks of these, and of Juvara's cupola, that in

¹ *Vide* Selwyn Brinton, "Humanism and Art," Prologue (*Renaissance in Italian Art*, Part iv.). Alberti's designs were in many cases carried out by Luca Fancelli, "another Tuscan architect, who entered Lodovico's service in 1450, and built or improved the beautiful villas at Goito, Cavriana, and Revere." *Vide* Cartwright, *op. cit.*



LODOVICO GONZAGA MEETS CARDINAL FRANCESCO ON THE LATTER'S RETURN FROM
ROME

FROM THE FRESCO BY ANDREA MANTEGNA IN THE SALA DEGLI SPOSI OF CASTELLO

“ absolute dissonance with the grave and reposeful character of the building they break in upon that solemnity which had been willed by Alberti.”

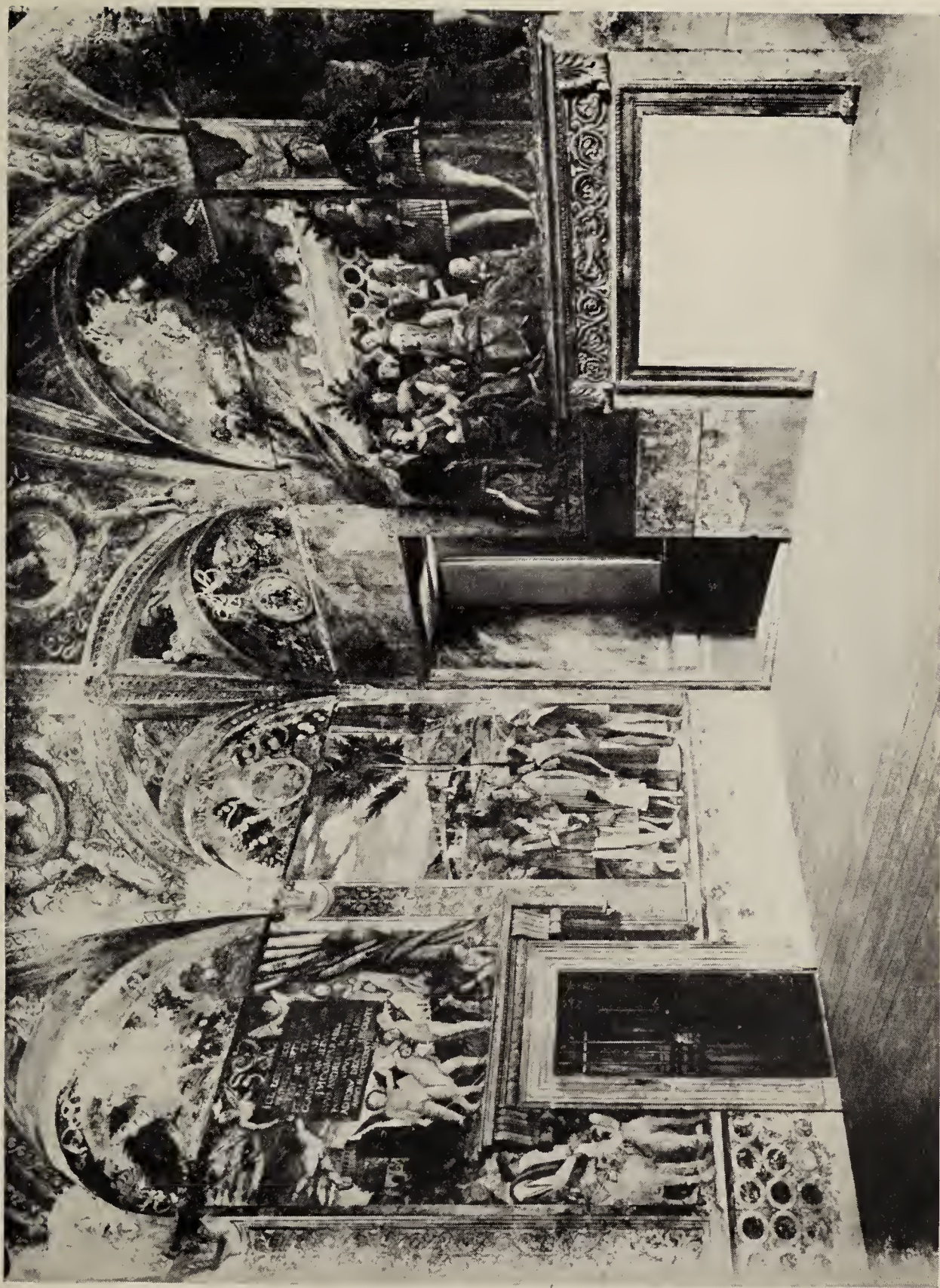
Yet even so the result is harmonious and impressive, and justifies Sir Banister Fletcher's praise when he says that “ the perfection of the proportions makes this church one of the grandest in this style, while the front is reminiscent of a Roman triumphal arch. It is the type,” he adds, “ of many modern Renaissance churches, consisting of a single nave with transepts, chapels alternating with entrance vestibules taking the place of the customary aisles.” Here then we see the round arch used to form the basis of noble and original architecture ; and the fine proportions of this earlier work influenced very probably the architect Bramante when he planned out St. Peter's Basilica at Rome. An old writer on Mantua, Giovanni Cadioli, mentions that the two saints, Andrew and Longinus the Martyr—whose story we have seen (Chapter I.) to have been so closely connected with that of the old church —“ were painted in fresco by Andrea Mantegna over the highest part of the façade.” Even in his day (1662) they were ruined and decayed, and have long since disappeared. But within S. Andrea itself, in the first chapel on the left as we enter, with its faded frescoes on the walls, is Andrea Mantegna's tomb, surmounted by the famous bust in bronze of himself. Tradition long assigned this to the medallist Sperandio, though it is just possible that it was from the Master's own hands, which had used in life the modelling tools. “ At least,” I have written, “ it shows the inspiration of his virile genius ; it expresses in the broad forehead, the deep-set eyes, the massive jaw, the character of the man and of his art.”¹

The Chapel of the Incoronata in the Basilica of S. Pietro, which was later to be rebuilt by Giulio Romano, is from Leo Battista Alberti's design, but was very freely restored. We come far nearer to his unspoiled creation in the little church of S. Sebastiano, which, as I write, is being restored as a war memorial. The façade and staircase, lighted in the lower part by five windows, alternately square or semicircular, have elements of great beauty, and recall in certain features the

¹ *Vide* Selwyn Brinton, *op. cit.*, Prologue.

most graceful Capella Pazzi, designed by Filippo Brunelleschi at Florence, or the earlier work of Bramante in Rome, of Laurana in the Palace of Urbino, or of Alberti himself in that wonderful temple which he designed for the Malatesta at Rimini, which Venturi has described as perhaps the most complete expression of the ideas developed by this architect of Humanism in his *De Re Ædificatoriâ*. For this little Mantuan church of St. Sebastian has just those qualities of balance, harmony, and of lucidity of conception, which are summed up by the great critic just mentioned in the word "eurithmia"—qualities which belong to this exquisite and elusive moment of the early Renaissance in Italy (Alberti, a contemporary of both Brunelleschi and Bramante, lived from 1404 to 1472), but which disappeared in the assertive classicism of a later age.

The wedding festivities of Federigo and Margherita, which I have described, had been suddenly overshadowed by a terrible and unwelcome visitor, the plague, which had already spread through Italy, doing terrible havoc in Ferrara, and appeared in 1463 among the Jews of Mantua who—crowded into their Ghetto, penalized by unjust legislation, and perhaps themselves not over cleanly—were later to bring it again to the city in a terrible moment of her history. The Marquis, with the "Sposi" and the rest of his family, retired to Revere, keeping for himself Borgoforte, Gonzaga, and Marmirolo; and published an edict, on October 20, in which he gave the citizens ten days to leave the city. Such was their terror that the Mantuans fled headlong into the country, and of 26,407 inhabitants only 2890 remained in the city under Carlo Agnelli, deputed by the Marquis to rule with absolute power. At the beginning of 1464, every trace of contagion had disappeared, the gates of Mantua were reopened, and the citizens returned with the Marquis and his family. Two years later (1466) the death of Alessandro Gonzaga, the favourite pupil of Vittorino, brought all his lands and castles in the Brescian territory by inheritance back to his brother Lodovico. Deficient in bodily vigour and health, and fond of a retired life, he had been a friend and protector of men of letters, and himself a fine scholar in Greek and Latin; and after his father's death had



THE SALA DEGLI SPOSI, IN THE CASTELLO OF MANTUA

DECORATED IN FRESCO BY ANDREA MANTEGNA



ruled with the greatest wisdom the lands and castles subject to him, for which he compiled a Statute Law, called after him, the "Alessandrino."

Through Mantuan story, plague, locusts, and flood reappear with persistent regularity as the dark side of the city's prosperity; and in 1467 there was one of these terrible inundations, which broke the dams in four places and flooded the whole Serraglio and a part of the city itself, causing heavy loss in stored grain.¹ But in spite of these troubles, the power and riches of Casa Gonzaga advanced, and the accession (1471) of Cardinal della Rovere to the Papacy—who was a native of Borgoforte in the Mantovano, and son, it is said, of a boat builder—was favourable to the Gonzaghi; for this Pope, though himself by no means an admirable character,² was on very good terms with the Cardinal of Mantua. The younger son of the Marquis, Gianfrancesco, had taken up the profession of arms in the service of the King of Naples, with the yearly salary of 2000 ducats. At the same time the relations of the Sforza, now Lords of Milan, and the Gonzaga at Mantua remained friendly and even intimate; so much so that Marquis Lodovico had offered his daughter Susanna to Galeazzo Sforza, who succeeded his father in the Dukedom; and, though she was rejected by him as unsound physically (*difettosa di corpo*), the young Duke took in her place later her sister Dorothea. Galeazzo can only be described as a devilish tyrant, the worst of his race; and a better match soon after offering itself with Bona di Savoia, the unhappy Dorothea died in early life (*in fresca età*) "not without suspicion of poison."³ He then

¹ The grain then lost was kept as a reserve supply in case of war, etc., at Governolo. The Serraglio lay between the Mantuan rivers, with draw-bridges on the bridges in case of attack, which had hitherto been generally from the side of Milan.

² See my *Golden Age of the Medici*, ch. vii., for an account of the Pazzi conspiracy at Florence, which Sixtus IV had undoubtedly engineered.

³ Sismondi says of him that there was no crime of which that false and ferocious man was not believed to be capable. Equicola's account of this matter is that, wishing to marry Bona, Galeazzo pressed the Pope to release him from his marriage, but met with the strongest opposition from Cardinal Gonzaga, who had great authority in Rome; so that, finding that way blocked, he tried that of making the "misera Dorotea" perish by poison. Julia Cartwright questions this, which is only given by Equicola as a report (*per quanto dicono*) in his time.

married Bona of Savoy, but—though jealous of the power of the Gonzaghi, and seeking to damage the position of Cardinal Francesco with Pope Sixtus at Rome—he evidently did not find it to his interest or safety to break with Mantua, and in 1470 offered again to Lodovico the command of the armies at Milan ; and the year following even came to Mantua with his Duchess to visit the Marquis, spending several days in the Castello.

The same year saw the commencement of the Basilica of S. Andrea from Alberti's design, and the magnificent endowment of the Ospedale Maggiore, in which all the hospitals were now united—the rents of the "consorzio," amounting to three thousand golden ducats, being incorporated, and placed at the disposal of this hospital for the benefit of the poor and infirm. I have been through the regulations then made for the inspection and relief of the poor and destitute, and they seem to me entirely admirable.¹ At the same time the Marquis favoured in every way the arts and commerce of his city, building (1473) the Casa del Mercato in the Piazza d'Erbe, raising near it the Tower of the Clock, and constructing the arcades which, says the chronicler, "are seen even now beneath the Palazzo della Ragione." "He next charged the astronomer and mathematician of Mantua, Bartolommeo Manfredi, to plan and construct a great machine for the use of the clock, which should serve not only to strike the hours of day and night for the city, but also indicate the changes of seasons, the passage of the sun through the signs of the zodiac, the appearance and movements of the planets, and the changes of the moon. The machine succeeded wonderfully for those times . . . and scarcely was it in place and working than Pietro Adamo de' Micheli took in hand a minute description, and published it in print in the same year." This Pietro Adamo is the master printer who has already come under our notice in this chapter ; and the grand old tower with its clock still records the time for the citizens of Mantua, though some of its machinery seems to be scarcely in working order.

The following year saw the visit of Christian, King of Denmark, a relation by marriage of the Marchesa Barbara, who came to visit the Gonzaghi in March 1474, and was

¹ *Vide Volta, op. cit.*, who gives these at length.



BASILICA OF S. ANDREA AT MANTUA
FACADE BY LEO BATTISTA ALBERTI, AND CAMPANILE
C

received with great rejoicings, in which the wool merchants (*mercanti di lana*) made gallant show—"it being estimated that there were set forth five thousand pieces of the finest cloth, beside a great quantity of the more ordinary made by the Fabbriche of Mantua." The trade of Mantua in cloth at this time must have been very extensive—as is shown not only by her Statutes of the "Arte della Lana," but by the shipping records of the Adriatic ports—and was carefully fostered by her Gonzaghi rulers.

In the same year Mantegna had completed the series of paintings in the upper "stanze" of the Corte Vecchia, which, says the chronicler, "with the exception of one room, which is called that of Mantegna, have all gone wrong (*sono ite male*)"; and it was in this apartment, then in all its fresh beauty, that the Queen of Denmark, sister of the Marchesa, stayed when she came to Mantua in May of 1475, and was entertained with "allegrezze," till—like her husband in the year previous—she went south to Rome, while the Marquis Lodovico with his confidants and ministers, Federigo Secco, Giacomo Crema and Bovalino, retired to Goito, "to discuss quietly certain matters of State."

Suddenly an event occurred which threatened the peace of North Italy in the assassination, on the 26th of December 1476, within the Church of S. Stefano at Milan, of Duke Galeazzo Sforza by three young Milanese nobles, one of whom he had wronged in his sister, and the others had robbed and injured. I have described elsewhere in detail this event, and never did a tyrant more justly meet his doom; but Galeazzo, though jealous of the Gonzaga and of the position at Rome of Cardinal Francesco, had offered the Marquis his command, from the fear that he might pass into the Venetian service; and immediately she heard of her husband's end, the Duchess Bona sent to Lodovico, begging him, as Captain-General of the Duchy of Milan, not to abandon her in this disaster.¹ Although indis-

¹ See, for the whole story, my *Golden Age of the Medici*, ch. vi. In her difficulty the Duchess Bona turned to the two strongest characters of her time in Italian policy—Lorenzo de' Medici and Lodovico Gonzaga, for their guidance and help—and neither of them failed her. It was her own later folly which gave the "Moro" the opportunity he was watching for, and lost for her unhappy child his Dukedom, and, in the end, his life.

posed at the time, and risking exposure in the wintry weather, Lodovico, on December 28, sent his son Federigo to summon his troops to Marcara, and bringing his remaining forces and his Captains to Canneto, undertook the journey to Milan, being carried in a litter, and arriving on January 2 of 1477. He found the brothers of the dead Sforza threatening to seize the Dukedom, to the exclusion of the rightful heir, Giangaleazzo, then a child of eight years ; but such was his influence and authority in Milan that he was able to appease these dissensions, confirm the Duchess and her young son in their just title, and induce the Sforza brothers to each accept a payment of twelve thousand ducats yearly, drawn from the city of Cremona.

In the year just passed (1476), the Marquis Lodovico had made to Mantegna a gift of land near the Church of S. Sebastiano, where the artist at once commenced to build himself a house, and the remains of this building are still to be seen near the church in the Via Acerbi. "A noble house it must have been, judging from the few fragments of the original building which still remain. Most of its outside has vanished, but within is still to be seen the beautiful rotunda of the central courtyard, with its dainty mouldings." ¹ It has been suggested that this charming rotunda of the ground floor may have been the artist's own studio ; but the building had led Andrea into considerable expense, and in May of 1478 he had to approach his patron for arrears due of salary. He received a kindly answer ; but the Prince confessed to his painter that he was himself pressed for money, and that his jewels were already pledged.

Three weeks later, Lodovico Gonzaga died at Goito. He had retired again there to avoid the pestilence caused by a terrible plague of locusts which—destroyed, it is said, at his order, and left lying on the fields—had poisoned the air ; but even there the pestilence found him in his beloved country home—whose decoration must have been one of his first commissions to Mantegna ²—while waiting for the Emperor's

¹ *Vide* Maud Cruttwell's *Mantegna*. It is easy to obtain access from the present house.

² Lodovico seems to have already, in 1456, commenced his efforts to bring Mantegna from Padua to his own city, and sent Fancelli in 1459-60 to arrange this. In May of 1463 Andrea is already receiving pay from the Court, and had



CHURCH OF S. SEBASTIANO AT MANTUA
FACADE AND STAIRCASE BY LEO BATTISTA ALBERTI

diploma, which was to confer on him certain fiefs of Viadana, Sabbioneta, Rivarolo, and Bozzolo. He died of a slow fever on the night of June 11, 1478, in the sixty-sixth year of his life, and his body was brought to Mantua without display and buried in her Cathedral of S. Pietro.¹ It was the Humanist Platina—one of the scholars of his Court beside Ognibene, Guarino of Verona, Politian, Leonicens, and the famous Filelfo²—who pronounced his funeral oration; and here the note of courtly praise rings true. A successful soldier—Captain-General of the armies of Milan and of Florence—a good father of his family, an excellent prince, a friend of his people, the patron of talent in art and letters, he had surmounted and triumphed over many difficulties. Under his rule Mantua had advanced in riches and industry, and her population had increased to forty thousand; above all, under his wise guidance she had come to claim a front place in the culture of her age. As at Florence at this very time, under Lorenzo the Magnificent, so here too, under Lodovico Gonzaga, that exquisite moment of the earlier Renaissance finds its utterance in art, architecture, and letters—through Vittorino, Guarino, Platina, Alberti, Mantegna. A certain severity is still apparent in this art; a Roman grandeur, a clarity of line, a dignity of conception is still the dominant note—in a later generation to be followed by the overflowing pride, the

been working for his patron at Goito and Cavriana before he was definitely established in Mantua in 1466. Lodovico's letter is worthy of himself—and his great artist. "Andrea . . . we perfectly remember the promises we made when you entered our service; neither have we failed to keep these promises. But you cannot take from us what we have not got, and yourself have seen that, when we had the means, we have never failed to do all in our power for you . . . and that gladly and of good will." *Vide Cartwright, op. cit.*

¹ As we are told by a contemporary; Donesmondi and Gionta say that he was buried in S. Francesco.

² The relations of Francesco Filelfo with Casa Gonzaga were constant and friendly, not only with Marquis Lodovico and his Marchesa, but with his brother Carlo, when this latter was fighting for Milan. Filelfo is constantly pressing Lodovico for money, and receiving generous help. He writes in 1452, and in 1453 returns to the assault in Latin and Italian. Having then a daughter to marry, he wants 250 ducats, and promises as many verses in his poem of the "Sforziade." In 1464 he is in such need that he will welcome from his Gonzaga patron 100 ducats or an old lined coat (*uno vestito foderato di mezzo tempo*). He stayed in Mantua on his journey to Rome.

almost sensuous splendour of Giulio the Roman, under his young Duke Federigo.

Between these two, uniting and completing both messages of old Mantua, there now rises before us that brilliant figure—the admitted Queen of her age, sharing to the full in its every interest and sympathy, and herself the very incarnation of the Renaissance spirit—of Isabella d'Este da Gonzaga, Princess of Mantua.



ISABELLA D'ESTE DA GONZAGA
FROM THE PAINTING BY TITIAN IN THE MUSEUM OF VIENNA

CHAPTER VII

THE BATTLE OF THE TARO

IN the preceding pages we have traced again and again the intimate connection with Mantua of the great House of Este, Lords of Ferrara ; in the days of the old Commune of Mantua and of the league against Frederick II and the cruel Ezzelino, in those of the Bonacolsi despotism and of the later Gonzaga dynasty in its secular struggle against the encroaching power of Milan, these d'Este Princes, as allies and sometimes enemies, have been familiar and frequent figures.

Like Mantua, Ferrara, lying in the midst of her fertile plains, was a city of commerce and wealth—" the first really modern city, with her broad streets and well-built quarters, her complete and modern system of finance."¹ Like the Gonzaga, these Este rulers had from the first welcomed the new learning and become enthusiastic patrons of its culture. Boiardo, Ariosto, Guarino, Tasso are famous as their poets ; Cosimo Tura, Costa, Dosso Dossi, Francia are their Court painters. Leonello d'Este, that brilliant and cultured prince, had been brought up under the great Humanist Guarino da Verona (*vide* Chapter VI.) ; and had, as we have seen, himself married a Gonzaga. His magnificent portrait medallion by Pisanello's hand, with its clever ugly face and close-cut hair, is yet preserved to us—a replica in colour, painted in 1447 by the Ferrarese Oriolo, being in our National Gallery. When he would set up an equestrian monument to his father's memory, he turned to Leo Battista Alberti, whose notes on this subject form the basis of his treatise *De Equo Animante*, and who

¹ *Vide* Selwyn Brinton, *Renaissance in Italian Art*, Part v. ch. i., " The Court of Ferrara."

wrote under this patron his famous work on architecture. What more natural than that Federigo, now Marquis of Mantua, looking for a bride for his first-born son, Francesco, should have turned to this now Ducal House of Este at Ferrara ?

Yet it was an accident which seems to have really decided this happy and fortunate union. Federigo, like his father, Lodovico Gonzaga, and his ancestors for three generations, was a great Condottiere—a soldier by profession, and leader of the troops of Milan. This career had, in fact, by this time become a tradition with the members of his House. “ He bore the name,” says the chronicler, “ of a man prudent in war, . . . and above all things he dreaded idleness. He built the palace of Marmirolo, and was Captain of the armed forces of the Duchy of Milan.” An opportunity now afforded itself for his military talents in the terrible conspiracy (1478) of the Pazzi at Florence, which, directed by Pope Sixtus IV against Lorenzo de’ Medici and his brother Giuliano, was soon to plunge Central Italy into war. While the Papal armies, with those of the King of Naples, invaded Tuscany, Pope Sixtus sought to divert the troops of Milan from coming to the aid of Florence, by bringing down the Swiss mountaineers of Uri into the plains of Lombardy ;¹ and Marquis Federigo was called on by the Duchess Bona of Milan, as General of her troops, to drive out these Swiss, who were threatening Lugano and the Milanese frontier. He achieved this successfully, and was made by the grateful Duchess Captain of the armies of Milan, with 30,000 scudi a year as his fee, and double this sum in time of war. He had left as his Ministers at home one Eusebio Malatesta, of Jewish origin, whom he made Cavaliere, and gave him charge of civil affairs, and Francesco Secco, who had the direction of arms, and was what we might call Minister of War ; but the jealousies between these two were to bring trouble later.

Then, in the spring of the year following—early May of 1479—Federigo marched south towards Tuscany, with two thousand horse and five hundred foot soldiers as Captain of

¹ See my *Golden Age of the Medici*, note on ch. vii., “ The Conspiracy of the Pazzi ” : “ Under this Pope, and as the result of his intrigues, for the first time the foreign invader was brought into Lombardy.”

the troops of Milan, preceded by Duke Ercole d'Este of Ferrara, who was Captain of the Venetians. The details of this important campaign belong more properly to Florentine history; and the Mantuan chronicler, after describing some successes, adds that, on news coming to the Marquis that his wife, Margherita of Bavaria, was very dangerously sick, he left the command to his lieutenant, Evangelista, son of Carlo Gonzaga, and arrived on October 17 at Mantua, where three days later the Princess passed away, being buried in S. Francesco. This statement is no doubt correct; but at the same time we know from other sources that there had been a serious quarrel among the leaders of the Florentine armies—more especially between the Duke of Ferrara and the Marquis of Mantua—which had led to the former also retiring with his followers, and to the disaster at Poggio Imperiale, which nearly exposed Florence to the enemy. “The whole campaign,” I have said elsewhere, “is an instance of the futile and expensive character of this mercenary warfare in the days of the Condottieri, when the leaders on both sides were mainly occupied with prospects of plunder and their personal feuds.”¹

The year 1480 saw a truce concluded between the Pope and his allies with the Republic of Florence and Duke of Milan; and in June of that year came an embassy from the Duc de Montpensier, of the Royal House of France, to beg for the hand in marriage of Chiara, daughter of Marquis Federigo. For the “divertimenti” then given by the Gonzaga in his honour, the Duke and Duchess of Ferrara had come to Mantua; and, though difficulties arose as to the terms of the Montpensier marriage, and it was for a time deferred, it led then by a happy chance to a far more important union. For the Marquis, while Duke Ercole d'Este was his guest, had opened the subject of a marriage to be effected in due time between Isabella, daughter of the latter, then nine years of age, and Francesco, first-born of the Marquis, who was then barely fifteen (*b.* 1466); “and without difficulty as to terms was this alliance estab-

¹ See my *Golden Age of the Medici*, ch. vii. p. 141. In this same year Federigo had received from the Emperor confirmation of his investiture as Marquis of Mantua—the original document of which was preserved in the Archivio Segreto of that city. It may be noted here that the right to grant or withhold investiture was throughout claimed by the Emperor.

lished." It was at this same time that the Marquis had built for himself a "palace and place of delight" in his lands of Marmirolo, an ancient heritage of Casa Gonzaga: irrigated by a placid stream and by the play of many fountains, with fairest gardens and shady groves in summer heats, this was for succeeding ages a place of recreation and delight for these Gonzaga Princes and their Court. Meanwhile, the negotiations for the Montpensier marriage were resumed in the year following, the Marquis giving to his daughter a dowry of twenty-six thousand golden ducats; and the wedding was celebrated in January (1481) with great rejoicings. Duke Ercole d'Este, who was then present, returned to Ferrara with Francesco, his future son-in-law; and the Marquis, who had also come as his guest, was splendidly entertained there by tournaments and races (*corsi di pali*).

These festive doings were, however, converted to grief by the periodic trouble of inundation, which in May of that year—after three days torrential rain—flooded the Mantovano, breaking the dams of the Po, Mincio, and Oglio, and "what completed the consternation" was the unwelcome return of the locusts, which devastated Goito and Cavriana; while, in the November following, the Marchesa Barbara passed away, mourned by her children and all her people. Then followed war, caused again by Pope Sixtus IV, who this time had stirred up the Venetians against Ferrara, purposing the destruction of the House of Este. Duke Ercole, seeing his great danger, appealed to the Princes of Northern Italy for help; and a League was formed, including Lodovico Sforza, now Regent of Milan, the King of Naples, the Marquises of Mantua and Monferrato, the Bentivoglio of Bologna, and the Republic of Florence—the famous Federigo of Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, being selected (1482) as Captain-General of their armies. In May of this same year the Venetians descended on the Ferrarese, both by land and water, and their forces spread over the Mantuan border. In vain did the Duke of Urbino hurry with his troops to Ostiglia, and Marquis Federigo cut the dams of the Mincio to deprive the Venetians of their supplies. Things were looking very badly for the League when Pope Sixtus IV, in fear of the increasing power of

Venice, suddenly made his own terms with Naples in December of 1482.

This changed at once the whole position of affairs ; and, on December 27, Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga came to Ferrara as Apostolic Legate for the affairs of this war—now able to use his great influence in favour of the League. In January of 1483 the Duke of Calabria, son of the King of Naples, had come north with two thousand horsemen, to the joy of the Mantuans ; and, on the last day of February, a Congress of the leagued powers was opened at Cremona. Lodovico Sforza was present with the Cardinal of Mantua, the Duke of Calabria, representing Naples, and Count Girolamo Riario, Captain of the Armies of the Church ; and with these Lorenzo de' Medici himself, who had come north especially to attend this important gathering. On the way he had passed through Mantua, and had spent an idle hour with the little Gonzaga Princesses, Elisabetta and Maddalena, who were brought to see him after dinner at his expressed desire by their governess, Violante de' Preti ; and to whom he said, with his charming courtesy, on leaving that their father was rich in fair children. Next day he was entertained, in his father's absence, by their brother, Francesco Gonzaga, who escorted him to Mass at S. Francesco, and then to the house of Andrea Mantegna, where " he admired some of Messer Andrea's paintings, as well as certain heads in high relief and other antiques, in which he seemed to take great delight." ¹ In the Congress at Cremona which followed, it was Lorenzo himself who, after Marquis Federigo had spoken at some length and with great judgment, suggested him to the Duke of Milan as Captain-General of his forces ; and Lodovico, agreeing to this, sent to Mantua his standard and baton of command. The division of North Italy, as here arranged, seems to have given Brescia, Bergamo and Crema to the Duke of Milan, Verona with the Veronese, Asola and Lonato to the Gonzaga, and Lucca to Florence. But the war was still on hand, and Marquis Federigo at once sent eight squadrons at his own charge to the Duke of Calabria in the Brescianino, and directed the twenty galleons lent by Milan to the aid of Ferrara ; while he himself took his post on the

¹ *Vide* Julia Cartwright, *op. cit.* ch. iii.

Mincio to watch the Venetian troops, Ferrara was freed by Duke Ercole d'Este from blockade, and Asola captured on October 8, 1483, and handed over to the Mantuans.

Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga had just returned from these matters of war to his duties as Legate at Bologna, when he died on October 22, 1483. He had been born to Marquis Lodovico and the Marchesa Barbara in 1444, made Cardinal (as we have seen) by Pius II in 1461, Bishop of Mantua in 1466, Legate Apostolic of Bologna in 1471, and Archbishop of Bologna by Sixtus IV after the Cardinal of Portugal's death. Thus, in succession, the great steps of Church preferment, save only the highest, had been climbed by him ; but deservedly from his high character, his attainments, and culture. From the first years of his Cardinalate, it has been said, although then of tender years, he was distinguished by his self-control and weight of counsel ; while his charm of manner, his kindness and munificence had won the love of all who knew him, so that his loss was mourned universally in Mantua, Bologna, and Rome.¹ A commanding figure in his time, when the ambition and nepotism of Sixtus IV kept Italy in continual strife, he is the first of a great series of Cardinals of the Gonzaga House who now enter our story. His likeness has been preserved to us in a famous medal of this prelate by Sperandio. His body was carried in state to Mantua, and buried in the Church of S. Francesco beside his ancestors, as he had willed ; and he was succeeded in the following year (1484) by the Protonotary Apostolic Lodovico Gonzaga, his own brother, in the Bishopric of Mantua.

At this point it is worth our noticing that a whole school of medallists had been for some time flourishing at Mantua under the direct patronage of Casa Gonzaga. I have already (Chapter IV.) had occasion to mention that noble medal by Vittore Pisano of Cecilia Gonzaga, with as its reverse the unicorn (symbol of chastity) guarding the maiden, " who sits sunk in dreams in a moonlit rocky waste " ; and no less important is the fine medal portrait, by the same Master, of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, " Primus Marchio Mantuæ," who appears in the reverse armed and on horseback, with his mounted squire

¹ Cf. Volta, *op. cit.*

in attendance ; nor can I pass by here his noble portrait of Vittorino da Feltre, inscribed "Victorinus Feltrensis summus . . . omnis Humanitatis pater." But Pisano, who had frequently visited Mantua, had left there successors to carry on his great tradition. Earliest among these is the medallist who signs himself "Petrus Domo Fani," from the town of that name on the Adriatic, and whose medal of Lodovico Gonzaga has on its reverse the legend, "*Noli me tangere*," above a seated Cupid—suggesting possibly his fidelity to Marchesa Barbara, and his confidence against any onslaught from the little god of Love. The first native medallist of Mantua is, however, Bartolomeo Melioli (1448–1519), who was in charge of the Mantuan Mint, and made five medals of the Gonzaga Princes—including Marquis Lodovico, his son Lodovico (who, as just mentioned, became Bishop of Mantua), and his grandchildren, Maddalena and Francesco, the latter before 1484, while still a youth—besides that of Christian, King of Denmark, when he passed through Mantua on his way to Rome in 1474. The imitation of antique portrait busts is already evident in the treatment of these medals, as differing from those of Pisanello ; and "this ought not to surprise us when we remember the reverence bordering on worship with which, in the home of Virgil, men honoured the antique, and how eagerly its remains were collected."¹ A contemporary of Melioli at Mantua was Bartolomeo Talpa, who worked as decorator in the palaces and villas of the Gonzaga, and to whom we owe the fine-signed medals of Marquis Federigo and his son, Francesco, and the unsigned charming portrait medal (head and bust) of the beautiful and unfortunate Julia Astalla.²

Yet more important is the medallist called L'Antico (*circa* 1460–1528), but whose real name was Jacopo Ilario Bonacolsi. One of the attractions of this wonderful art of the medallist is that, having secured his portrait, the artist can give his imagination free play on the reverse. What, for instance, could be more delightful than that of the beautiful

¹ Cf. Cornelius v. Fabriczy, *Italian Medals*, ch. ii. The reverse of Vittorino's portrait medal shows the pelican feeding her young with her own blood.

² A novel of Bandello relates that, having been outraged by a servant of the Bishop of Mantua, she threw herself into the waters of the Oglio, and was honoured by the Bishop with a monument.

Antonia del Balzo, Princess of Altamura—whose husband, Gianfrancesco Gonzaga of Sabbioneta, was also portrayed by L'Antico—where the ship of her life is drawn through the waves by Cupid and Pegasus (signifying Love and Poetry) and guided by Hope. No less attractive and “jewels of their kind” are the medals, especially in reverse, by his contemporary, Giancristoforo Romano, who was in Mantua from 1497 to 1505, making there in 1498 a medal of his patroness, Isabella d'Este, which was so much sought after that, in 1505, he had to make a replica, but with slight variations.

Among the Mantuan medallists of this time is Gian Marco Cavalli, who, born in the Mantovano in 1450, was employed by the Gonzaga as goldsmith and sculptor in bronze. His portrait medals show strongly the influence of L'Antico, though the reverses are freely conceived; and to him has been attributed the famous bronze bust of Mantegna over his tomb (*vide* Chapter VI.) in S. Andrea at Mantua, which is all the more likely “since he was chosen by the celebrated painter to act as executor of his last will. In this case we have to recognize in our medallist the foremost bronze sculptor of Mantua.”¹ But this bust of the painter has also been attributed to the medallist Sperandio, who was at the front of his art at this time. Born at Mantua, and the son of a goldsmith, he had moved thence to Ferrara; but appears at Mantua in 1450, and at Milan after 1460, where he made his portrait medal of Duke Francesco Sforza. By his hand, too, are the fine portrait medals of the great Federigo da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, of Niccolò da Correggio—that “*erudito cavaliere*” praised by Marchesa Isabella,² who was son-in-law of Bartolomeo Colleoni—of Count Carlo Grati, friend of the Bentivoglio of Bologna, and of Giovanni Bentivoglio II and his wife, “the beautiful and intriguing Ginevra Sforza.” But I return now to his noble portrait medal of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, with its reverse showing an obelisk and dog (the latter symbolizing this

¹ Cf. Cornelius *v.* Fabriczy, *op. cit.*

² It was Niccolò da Correggio who, at her request, selected the motto “*Benemerentium ergo*” for the medal of Isabella d'Este just mentioned, with its reverse of the Archer and the Star. A perfect courtier and a poet, he was for years her friend and admirer, and spoke of her at the Court of Milan as “*la prima donna del mondo.*”

prelate's fidelity and watchfulness for the Church) and the legend "*Liberalitatis. ac. Rom. eccl. jubar,*" and the signature "*Opus Sperandii.*"¹ I shall return again later in this chapter, though more briefly, to the medals of this time, which, priceless in themselves as works of art, are not less so as a living commentary on the characters who fill its story.

At this time occurs one of those terrible domestic tragedies which from time to time leave a dark stain on this golden story of Casa Gonzaga. Ridolfo, brother of Marquis Federigo, being already in their service, had taken the side of the Venetians against Ferrara; but, rather than bear arms against his brother, he had found an opportunity (in October 1483) to retire with his soldiers to Mantua. There, receiving a bad impression of the conduct of his wife, Antonia de' Malatesta, he went in a rage to Luzzara, and, blinded by passion, gave orders to the executioner to cut off that unhappy woman's head.² Later it came out that Antonia, being constantly at the Court of Mantua, had opposed the designs of Federigo's favourite Minister, Eusebio Malatesta, who had sworn to bring about her destruction; and the calumnies he had spread about her were only discovered after Marquis Federigo's death, when, lacking this latter's powerful protection and attacked by his rival, Francesco Secco, this Eusebio became hated by all.

Meanwhile, the war with Venice dragged on, with frequent disagreements between the Moro and the Duke of Calabria, until at length a treaty of peace was concluded, in August of 1484, between the Pope, with Naples, Milan, Florence and Ferrara on the one side, and Venice on the other, in which Asola, which was still in the hands of the Marquis of Mantua, was restored to Venice. Very indignant, as feeling that his interests had been sacrificed to those of Lodovico Sforza, Marquis Federigo had returned home, when a sudden illness proved fatal to him at the early age of forty-two. By his will he declared Francesco his heir and successor, providing

¹ Cf. Volta, who writes: "This famous sculptor of medals lived in those times in our city, and the medals of famous men of that time bear his name, with Mantovano added."

² *Vide* Schivenoglia, Mem. MS.

honourably for his other sons—Giovanni and Sigismondo—and giving to his daughters—Chiara, Maddalena, and Elisabetta—suitable dowries. He was buried in the monument of the Gonzaga within S. Francesco.

It seems as if there had been fear of some move on the part of Ridolfo, brother of the late Marquis, for Alfonso of Calabria hurried at once to Mantua to proclaim Francesco as the successor; then, on the 24th of July 1484, this young prince, accompanied by his uncle, Bishop Lodovico, and his two brothers, came to the Piazza del Castello to receive from the Massaro of the Commune the sceptre of command, and thence to the Cathedral of S. Pietro to hear Mass. He was then eighteen years of age, and already showed promise of great things—"well equipped enough in letters, a lover of wise men, and most expert in riding, used to weapons and to the chase, prudent in foreseeing dangers and of great heart in overcoming them. . . . Passionately fond of horses he spared no expense in acquiring the best, and secured a great number from Naples, Sicily, Spain, Barbary and Arabia, with which he established at the Te, without Porta Pusterla, those breeds which are held so famous."

Before his father's death he had already studied the art of war under the Duke of Calabria and Trivulzio, but now he placed before his military career the good of his subjects and their peace. Yet the love of adventure was strong in him, and, while his envoy was receiving from the Emperor the confirmation of his investiture,¹ the Prince himself, desirous of getting to know personally the affairs of Italy, formed the project of traversing that country with eight of his young companions, clad in plain armour, and in the strictest "incognito." He appeared at Milan, "where Duke Lodovico disposed as he willed of the Duchy without regard to the young Duke Galeazzo." At Venice he took part in some "giostre," where, in combat "corps à corps" he overthrew "that strongest champion, Leone, bastard of the aforesaid Sforza." He spent a month in Rome, and then went south to Naples, coming to know the enmities of the Orsini and Colonna, the

¹ The original diploma of this investiture was preserved in the Archivio Segreto of Mantua.



FRANCESCO II GONZAGA
FROM THE MARBLE BUST (XV CENTURY) IN THE REGGIA OF THE GONZAG

discontent of his barons towards Ferdinand of Naples, the disposition of the Pope and the schemes of the Sforza ; and finally, returning to Florence and letting himself be known there, was received with high honours by Lorenzo the Magnificent, Chief of the Republic, and thence came home to Mantua. It had been a wonderful journey of adventure, giving him a close insight into the Italy of his day ; almost it seems one of those legends of Mantua—like that of the “ Preziosissimo,” or of Sordello, or the flight of Federigo—in which the gallant young Marquis plays the part of the fairy Prince, for whom in that Red Palace of old Ferrara, with its guarding moat, the Princess of his dreams was even then waiting.

“ For it was time,” says the Chronicler of this year of 1489, “ that our Marquis should carry out the wishes of his late parent, who ten years earlier had destined for his bride Isabella, daughter of Ercole, Duke of Ferrara, Modena and Reggio.”¹ Since then she had grown up into a beautiful and accomplished maiden, with fair hair and clear white skin ; she had studied the classics under the scholar Battista Guarino, and music, embroidery and dancing, in the midst of a Court whose culture was itself an inspiration, and was adored by her parents and teachers. Before this Francesco had visited the Emperor Frederick III at Frankfort, and on his return had wisely kept himself free from the intrigues of Lodovico Sforza who sought his alliance, and had devoted himself to the good of his people, and to helping forward the industries of Mantua. He found husbands at the same time (1486) for his two sisters : for Elisabetta, Guidobaldo di Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino ; for Maddalena, Giovanni Sforza of Cotignola, Lord of Pesaro, giving each a dowry of 27,000 ducats. We must admire less his treatment of his uncle Lodovico, the Bishop of Mantua, who was “ pressing Rome to have the purple (as Cardinal), but that the Marquis worked his hardest to spite him ; and things got to such a pass that the Bishop, Gianfrancesco, and Ridolfo ” (all uncles of his own) “ had to remain exiles from Mantua.” In vain did the Pope, Lorenzo de’ Medici, and the Queen of Denmark intervene to bring them to peace. The Bishop at last, finding his way blocked, left Rome in disgust,

¹ Cf. Volta, *op. cit.*

and retired to his Castle at Gazzuolo, where—in the true spirit of his age—he gave himself up to collecting antiques, to forming a great library, and conversing with men of letters.¹

But now the destined bride was on her way to Mantua, arriving by water on February 15, 1490, escorted by her father Duke Ercole, her mother Leonora of Aragon, her brother Alfonso d'Este, and many nobles of Ferrara. Marquis Francesco had gone forth to meet them without Porta Pradella with his Ministers, magistrates, and knights, and now the procession took its way through those old Mantuan streets, made glad with tapestries, flowers, and emblems, and with no less than seven pageant plays (*rappresentazioni*), “executed with music and poetry”; until at length it reached that frowning old Castello of the Gonzaga, where a fair boy with angel wings was ready to recite an “epithalamium,” and—more welcome still—Elisabetta Gonzaga, the young Duchess of Urbino, was waiting to welcome her new sister. That it was a brilliant wedding goes without saying, honoured by the presence of Ambassadors of the Emperor “Cæsar himself,” of the Highest Pontiff, of the Kings of France and Naples, of the Duke of Milan and of the Republics of Florence, Genoa, and Venice; while Annibale Bentivoglio, who had recently married another daughter of Duke Ercole, came in person,² and it is estimated that no less than 17,000 persons had come into the city. For three successive days followed “giostre” and tournaments, in which the Bentivoglio won distinction, and for eight days the tables of the Court were spread and the rejoicings continued; then over this sky of unclouded sunshine suddenly the first cloud, significant of storm, cast its darkening shadow. For “scarcely had the great personages left than the Ambassadors of Venice made it known that they had chosen the occasion of this wedding to treat of most secret and important

¹ Volta suggests that the discord between uncle and nephew had been fermented by Francesco Secco, confidant and Minister of the late Marquis; Cartwright, that Francesco wished the Cardinal's hat for his own brother Sigismondo. In any case, the whole matter does not show his character—which we shall see more of later in these pages—in a very favourable light.

² Lucrezia, natural daughter of Duke Ercole, had been married at Ferrara, on January 26, 1487, to Annibale, son of Giovanni Bentivoglio, Lord of Bologna; Francesco Gonzaga being present at the wedding.



CASTELLO OF THE GONZAGA AT MANTUA

FROM THE BRIDGE OF S. GIORGIO



business." To understand this we must here seek to form some idea of the perils which threatened Italy in that fateful moment of her history.

The great figure of Lorenzo de' Medici had been, up to this point, a controlling influence in Italian policy ; but with his death, which occurred two years later (1492), the forces which held Italy together under his guiding and practised hand were withdrawn. The Allies—whom we have seen united against the aggression of Venice against Ferrara—began to quarrel among themselves ; and the threat of foreign invasion, always in the background, came close and yet closer as a terrible reality. Even at this time the intrigues of Lodovico Sforza, which were very soon to bring about this invasion, were threatening their evil consequences. He had unjustly usurped the Dukedom of Milan, in defiance of the rights of his nephew, the young Duke Gian Galeazzo, and had occupied the Castello and fortresses of the Duchy ; and the Senate of Venice, informed of his designs and foreseeing danger, sought to have the young Marquis Gonzaga on their side and to make with him a firm alliance. " In these terms the Ambassadors spoke at length ; and, since the cessation of Asola through the intrigues of Lodovico was yet recent, and his good faith had fallen among the Princes of Italy, so it became easy to obtain from our Marquis the promise of friendship and his acceptance, with a handsome stipend, of the command of the Armies of the Republic." ¹

But for the moment these negotiations were kept closely private. The marriage of Beatrice d'Este, sister of the young Marchesa Isabella, was to be celebrated in January of 1491 with no less splendour than that of the Mantuan wedding ; and though Marquis Francesco, fearing to offend Venice, found it more discreet not to be present, he let himself be represented by his brilliant young wife, who ransacked the merchants of Ferrara and Venice for furs and jewels,² carried

¹ See Volta, *op. cit.*

² She writes at this time to the Gonzaga agent in Venice, Zorzo Brognolo, for eighty of the finest sables, to make a *sbernia* or mantle. " You must also buy eight yards of the best crimson satin in Venice to line the said *sbernia*, and for God's sake use your accustomed diligence." *Vide* Cartwright, *op. cit.* ch. iv.

all before her at Milan and at once conquered the friendship of her new brother-in-law, Lodovico Sforza. The wedding of her brother Alfonso d'Este with Anna Sforza, niece of Lodovico, took place very soon after (January 1491) in the Ducal Chapel at Milan, and was completed next month (12th February) at Ferrara. In spite of wintry conditions the reception of the bridal pair in that city was a brilliant one. Triumphal arches, adorned with all the gods of old Olympus, had been erected in the streets of Ferrara; after the nuptial blessing had been given there followed a performance of the *Menæchmi* of Terence, and a banquet and ball in which the Marquis of Mantua danced with the bride and Alfonso with his sister the Marchesa; while later in the night Isabella herself danced country dances with Anna Sforza, to the applause of the company, till at length the bride was conducted to her chamber by the courtiers with blazing torches.

In the summer of the same year Isabella returned to Milan, on August 10, at the special invitation of Lodovico and her sister Beatrice; while her husband, passionately fond of horses, was attending public races at Siena and Lucca. During his absence that trusted Minister of the Gonzaga, Francesco Secco, had applied for leave of absence and betook himself to Pisa. His sudden departure caused suspicion, and his wife and servants were arrested and examined; and "there emerged the plan of Secco to kill the Marquis." The fugitive himself had got clear away with his money and jewels, but three of his servants were publicly executed in front of the Cathedral of S. Pietro; and it was then found that Evangelista Gonzaga, who had for ten years been imprisoned at Castellaro on the charge of high treason, was innocent—the whole charge having been trumped up against him by this evil Minister.¹ Released from prison, he was carried "as in triumph" from Castellaro to Mantua, to the home of his decrepit mother. But his health was ruined by long imprisonment, and he died in the year following (1492), being buried beside his father, Carlo Gonzaga, without the great door of S. Maria delle Grazie.

Isabella d'Este was a most voluminous and untiring correspondent, and many of her letters have been preserved,

¹ Cf. Volta, *op. cit.*

and throw—even when of a more trivial character—the most valuable light upon her character, and her times.¹ She kept in constant touch by letter with her mother at Ferrara, her sister Beatrice and Duke Lodovico at Milan, with Elisabetta Gonzaga, Duchess of Urbino, with her brother Alfonso, and even her half-sister Lucrezia d'Este. She writes to her agents for jewels and furs, for linen of Rheims (*tela di Rensa*), for silks, velvet, and fine cloth for *sbernie* and *camore*, for Latin classics and romances of the Paladins of France, for engraved gems, niello work and pictures. Not the least interesting among her letters are those describing the visits which she made to the lovely lake of Garda and the lemon groves of Salò with her sister-in-law and dearest friend, the Duchess of Urbino; with whom, too, she spent happy hours at Mantua in her apartment in the old Castello overlooking the lakes—which, as we shall see later, she was to transform into a thing of unique beauty, a wonderful expression of her many-sided personality. She had been blessed with a daughter, born on the last day of 1492, and named by her Leonora Violante—after her own mother, whose recent loss she had felt acutely. She is at Marmirolo, the beautiful country home of the Gonzaga, in the February of the next year, enjoying theatre and hunting parties; and goes thence to Loreto, and then to visit her beloved friend Elisabetta in her palaces of Gubbio and Urbino.

Meanwhile, over this brilliant courtly life of Renaissance Italy the storm-cloud from across the Alps had been coming near and yet nearer. Insecure in his usurped power, ceaselessly scheming, jealous and distrustful of Florence, Venice and Naples, Lodovico Sforza took the fatal step of inviting the young French King to enter Italy and possess himself of the crown of Naples. All that delicate balance of power between the five great Italian States, which Lorenzo de' Medici had so carefully cherished, fell to pieces in a moment. The French armies passed through Lombardy, where the sudden death of the young Duke Gian Galeazzo Sforza left a

¹ Much of this correspondence has been given to the world through the researches of Luzio and Renier, with a valuable commentary; and presented in an attractive English form by Julia Cartwright in her *Isabella d'Este*.

sinister impression ; then along the seacoast through Pisa and Florence, where Savonarola was already a political power, welcomed at Siena and in Rome herself by the Borgia Pope, and carrying fire and sword into the kingdom of Naples. There can be no doubt that the French King had made a great effort to get Marquis Francesco on his side, and, in April of this fateful year of 1494, had sent a special embassy to Mantua with flattering offers. The French influence was strong then at the Mantuan Court, for we may remember that Chiara Gonzaga, sister of the Marquis, had recently married the Duc de Montpensier, a leader in this French invading army, which was welcomed at Asti by Lodovico Sforza and Duke Ercole d'Este, the brother-in-law and father of Isabella ; but Francesco stood firm to his pledges to Venice, though he permitted the Marchesa to go, at the invitation of Duke Lodovico, to Parma to see the first French cavalry pass through that city.

By the spring of 1495 all Italy had already repented of her folly in bringing the French invaders into her midst. " Then, but too late, it was recognized that they should have opposed the descent of Charles from the Alps, and this same Lodovico repented a thousand times of having been the prime mover of such sorrows, fearing that Louis, Duke of Orleans, might take the opportunity to bring forward his claims to the Duchy of Milan through his grandmother, Valentina Visconti." ¹ Thus, while Charles VII was amusing himself in the sunshine of Naples, a League was being hurriedly concluded in the month of April at Venice between that Most Serene Republic, the Duke of Milan, the Pope, with the support of Ferdinand the Catholic of Spain and Maximilian, King of the Romans—its open intention being that its members should mutually assist one another ; but its secret provisions were intended to drive the French out of Italy, and to occupy Asti, then held for King Charles by the Duke of Orleans. De Comines, French Ambassador at Venice, on the night that the League was formed wrote, " My heart was heavy, and I had grave doubts about the safety of the King and all his company " ; and King Charles, alarmed at the storm rising behind him, left his life of idle pleasure in Naples and hurried northward,

¹ Cf. Volta, *op. cit.*

leaving only six thousand troops under the Duc de Montpensier to hold for him the Regno of Naples. Pontremoli was seized by his advance guard, and sacked by the Swiss in his pay ; and meanwhile the armies of the League had assembled in Lombardy to bar his passage, and at the head of her forces Venice, with the title of Governor-General, had set Francesco Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, “ yet very young, but believed to be of high spirit and desirous of glory.” ¹

The objective of the French King was to seize the passage of the Taro, and join his cousin, the Duke of Orleans, who was awaiting him at Novara. Leaving Pontremoli in ashes, he pushed forward with all speed ; but found the Leagued Italian armies awaiting him on the river bank near Fornovo. “ Here if anywhere,” it has been said, “ the French ought to have been crushed. They numbered about 9000 men in all, while the Allies were close on 40,000.” ² Added to this, the French troops were tired with forced marches, while the Italians were fresh and well provided. The French King sent forward a trumpet, demanding of the Allies passage for his army to return to France, and offering to pay for all supplies. There were divided counsels on the Italian side—the speakers of Venice and Milan inclining to let them pass through, the envoy of the King of Spain pressing for a decisive conflict. They decided weakly at last to dismiss the trumpet, and refer the matter in writing to Milan and Venice ; but while they were thus hesitating the conflict had begun. For at dawn of the next morning—July 6, 1495—the French army advanced in order of battle to cross the river, placing their artillery in front with the lancemen and the Swiss, “ the nerve and hope of the army ” ; then the main battle array and the King himself, “ armed at all points and mounted on a fine courser,” with beside him Monsieur de la Trémouille, a famous Captain of France, followed by the rearguard and baggage.

Whatever his faults, Marquis Francesco was a brave man—a soldier by instinct and profession, with the blood in his veins of a great fighting race. He should, perhaps, have remained

¹ Cf. Guicciardini, *Messere Francesco*, *Dell' Istoria d'Italia*, Lib. ii.

² *Vide* Symonds, *op. cit.* ch. x.

as Captain-General, to give his orders and watch the battle's issue ; but he was young, passionate for glory, and spoiling for a fight. Leaving behind him Antonio di Montefeltro, son of the great Duke of Urbino, in charge of his supports, with a strong squadron to come to his aid when needed, with his Mantuan knights and six hundred chosen men-at-arms and a great band of the wild Stradiot cavalry, who loved their young leader and would follow him anywhere, he plunged into the swollen river, and fell upon the French rearguard who were even then preparing to cross. King Charles, seeing such a force upon his rear, turned round to fight a rearguard battle ; but the Mantuan Prince and his followers were already driving their way into his lines.

“ It is most certain that the charge which the Marquess gave was resolute and furious, and was no less valiantly answered by the French, the squadrons on both sides entering the conflict pell-mell (not according to the custom of the wars of Italy) . . . at whose encounter fell many men-at-arms and horses, and the lances being broken every one began with the same fury to lay hands upon their maces, estockados, and other short weapons, the horses no less fighting with their feet and teeth. And truly the valour and resolution of the Marquess, followed by a valiant company of young gentlemen and picked lancemen, forgot nothing which appertained to a Captain couragious.” ¹

In the words of the old writer we seem even now almost to hear the clash of the weapons, the shouts of triumph or despair, the cries of the wounded, the turmoil, dust, and din of the bloody conflict. The young Marquis had more than one horse killed under him, but still was fighting on with his Mantuan knights. “ The French were beginning manifestly to give way, not without peril of their King, near whom was taken prisoner, though fighting fiercely, the Bastard of Bourbon ; so that this fortune put hope in the Marquess to have the person of the King himself, and he made with his followers the

¹ I have preferred here to take the fine English version of Guicciardini by Geffray Fenton, with its noble Elizabethan English, but which I find to closely follow the Italian original. Cf. *The History of Guicciardini*, . . . *reduced in English by Geffray Fenton*. Imprinted at London, 1599.

greatest effort to achieve this." A few paces more and the great prize would have been his, the victory achieved, and the story of Italy—even perhaps of Europe and the world—have been a very different one ; it may have been in that moment of this fiercest conflict that, like the old Sienese or the men of Parma in their hour of need, he had sent up his prayer to Our Lady of Succour, to Madonna of the Victory.

But the French King Charles had seen, too, his own imminent peril, and "abandoned of worldly succour, had recourse to heavenly aids, making vow to St. Denys and St. Martyn, reputed protectors particular of the Realm of France." His was a feudal army, to whom the person of their King was something sacred ; and his men ran together from all sides to protect him with their bodies, while a squadron of his horse charged the Italians in the rear. It was at this moment of the battle that Ridolfo Gonzaga, "Condottiere of great experience and uncle of the Marquis," who had the special charge to call for the supports at the moment they were needed, "moving from point to point to encourage his men and check any beginning of disorder," opening for a moment his helmet, was struck in the face by a Frenchman, and falling from his horse was slain or crushed to death in that tumult of battle and furious horses. At the same time the Stradiot cavalry, who should have taken the French in the rear, attracted by the immense booty from all Italy, fell upon the French camp and gave themselves to its plunder. Antonio di Montefeltro, waiting vainly for Ridolfo's message, had sent no help ; and the little band around the Marquis became themselves in great peril—"nor was it possible that these few should resist many with the enemy increasing on every side, and many dead and wounded, chiefly in the special company of the Marquess." They were driven back across the river, swollen with fresh rains during the battle itself, the French pressing them hard and killing all whom they took, to find, on the other side, that the Italian front under Count Gaiazzo of Milan had crumpled up, and were flying in wild confusion along the high road towards Piacenza and Parma. By his presence and authority the Marquis restored some order, and averted the disaster which might have followed had the French

then pressed their attack ; but the enemy was saved, the hope of a decisive victory was for ever lost.

Before daybreak, the French King took his departure “without sound of trumpet to cover his discamping,” while the Marquis sent Count Gaiazzo to harass his retreat with the light cavalry and himself followed to prevent the King joining the Duke of Orleans at Novara. In this pursuit the Gonzaga saw again that a vigorous attack “with a good stiffening of his own men ” might yet defeat the enemy, and the place where he planned to attack was near Stradella ; but the Milanese Captain opposed him, saying, “that the best for them was that the enemy should depart, and it even seemed to him that they should make a bridge of silver (*un ponte de arzento*) to get them quickly out of the country, and give them no occasion to remain and do more harm.”¹ King Charles reached Asti in safety, and signed a treaty at Vercelli, on October 19, with the Duke of Milan ; and on October 22 (1495), “repassed the Alps, after having ravaged all Italy with the violence of a hurricane.”

This was the memorable battle of the Taro, in which both sides claimed the victory : the Italians for having captured and spoiled the enemy’s camp and seen him retreat, the French in having secured that retreat, which was their object, and having inflicted heavy loss on their opponents. The letter which the Marquis sent to the Marchesa Isabella immediately after the battle (*Ex castris victricibus. VII Julii 1495*) gives his first and true impression. “The battle of yesterday with the enemy was very cruel . . . and what we did personally is well enough known, and if the others had but followed the victory would have been complete and not one of them ” (the enemy) “would have remained . . . and the chief cause of

¹ *Vide* Luzio, *Chroniche del Marchese di Mantova* : “With this disposition of mind any thought of attack was impossible ” ; and it would seem that after the bloody battle they had experienced, there was no desire to provoke another. The French lost only two hundred, and the Italians not less than three thousand (*vide* Guicciardini). Sismondi says : “Gonzaga left three thousand five hundred dead on the field.” The body of Ridolfo Gonzaga was found and buried with high honour in S. Francesco at Mantua. With him had fallen other Mantuan knights—Galeotto degli Ippoliti, Roberto de Bagno, Guido Gonzaga, and Giovanni Maria Gonzaga, Count of Calvisano.

disorder was the disobedience of the Stradiots, who thought of nothing but plunder, and when we had most need of them no one was willing to appear.”¹

Isabella was evidently very anxious for his safety. Before the conflict she had sent him a relic from the wood of the Cross to wear round his neck in the hour of danger ; and she wrote him later, when besieging Novara : “ I pray and entreat you to be very careful and not to expose yourself . . . as I am sure you discharge your office best and most efficiently by giving orders to others rather than by fighting yourself.” But the Marquis now found himself—not undeservedly, as we have seen—the hero of the day. While still before Novara he was created by the Republic of Venice Captain-General of her armies, with a stipend—like his predecessors—of fifty thousand ducats a year in time of peace and sixty thousand in war ; and as a special distinction for his recent services another two thousand ducats was added yearly, and to Marchese Isabella herself one thousand ducats, with which she told Brognoli to pay her debts in Venice and buy for her four pieces of the finest watered silk (*tabi*).

After the treaty was made the Marquis, going to Vercelli to pay his respects to the French King, had been received with every honour ; and on November 1 he made his triumphant entry into Mantua, surrounded by a chosen squadron of warriors, and four days later went forward to Venice with Anibale Bentivoglio, where a great reception was waiting him—the Doge and Senate going forth to meet him in the Bucen-taur, and entertaining him magnificently. If he had any doubt on the subject at first, by this time he had become fully convinced of his victory. He had almost forced upon him the rôle of champion of Italian glory ; and found the part to

¹ The booty taken by the Stradiots in the French camp—the plunder of the Regno and rich cities of Italy—must have been enormous. It included the golden seals of the French King, an office or prayer book said to have been that of Charlemagne, the portable altar and relics brought by the King, which were taken from his valet Gabriel, and portraits of the ladies of pleasure who had pleased King Charles in the various cities of Italy. Several of these objects came into the hands of the Marquis, and were returned by him to the King with Gabriel himself and with the portraits—“ *certi ritratti di damiselle del Re* ”—for which he received a letter with the King’s most grateful thanks.

suit him admirably. It was in the tradition of his house that, under such conditions, a medal should be struck; and here was the famous old medallist Sperandio, back in his native Mantua, and waiting his command. One of the two medals then struck for the Marquis bears the legend, "*Ob. Restitutam. Italiæ libertatem*" ("For her freedom given back to Italy"), and the other is dedicated to the Liberator of all Italy (*Universæ Italiæ Liberatori*).¹ But Francesco's vow in the hour of conflict was yet to be fulfilled; and this commission was given by him to the genius of Andrea Mantegna. There had been some trouble at Mantua in his absence with a Jewish banker, Daniele Norsa, whose house had been nearly wrecked by the mob and himself condemned to pay a fine; and this fine of one hundred ducats was now transferred to the painter, and, whether fair or unfair, was at least the excuse for a masterpiece. Our Lady of the Victory, a figure of serene beauty, with the Holy Child upright on her knee, extends her hand to the mailed figure, kneeling at her feet, of Francesco Gonzaga, with behind her the warrior Saints George and Michael and the patrons of Mantua SS. Andrew and Longinus, while the kneeling St. Elizabeth may be in the form of that holy nun, the Beata Osanna, who was revered and loved by Isabella.² This grand creation of Madonna of the Victory in her shrine at Mantua seems to have remained unharmed for ages, even through the horrors of the sack of Mantua, to be carried off at last by order of Napoleon; it is now one of the greatest treasures of the Musée du Louvre, in the hands of the nation whose defeat it was intended to commemorate.

But behind all this rejoicing there was always that sombre background of war—of the peril past and future from across the Alps. The Marquis had been sent by Venice to help King

¹ *Vide Volta, op. cit.* One of these medals, to commemorate Fornovo, I found in the Medagliere of the Museo Nazionale of Florence. Sperandio made at this time three of his best medals, representing the leaders of the League against France—the Doge Agostino Barbarigo, Marquis Francesco Gonzaga, and Giovanni Bentivoglio II, who had come to Mantua for the celebrations of the victory.

² On the other hand, Volta says that the figure at the side kneeling in prayer is Madonna Isabella; and that the Marquis hung near the High Altar the arms he had worn in that bloody conflict. The picture was seized by the French in 1797.

Ferrante of Naples to drive what was left of the French invading army out of his dominions. The leader of the French was Gilbert Duc de Montpensier, who, we may remember, had married Chiara Gonzaga, and while the two husbands were opposing each other in the Regno, Chiara remained at Mantua with her sister-in-law, to whom she was much attached; and this fact has its significance in connection with later developments. Left at Mantua, Isabella resumed her studies of the classics and of music, taking lessons on the lute and commissioning an instrument from the great lute-maker of the time, Lorenzo Gusnasco of Pavia, fashioned in ebony inlaid with ivory, with her favourite device of the star.¹ When dull she had her dwarfs to amuse her; Fritello, who could dance and sing and turn somersaults; and Matello, "the foremost fool of the world" (*el primo matto del mondo*), who could imitate a tipsy man to perfection, who appeared one day, in friar's habit, to be announced as the Venerable Padre Bernardino Matello; and who, when he died, was buried in S. Francesco, the burial-place of the Gonzaga themselves.

But a shadow seemed to hang over Italy in these closing years of her brilliant fifteenth century. The war dragged through that summer of 1496 in the south. There was sickness in both armies, and when the Duc de Montpensier had on August 15 to surrender Atella he was dangerously ill; while soon after the Marquis himself became very sick, and was obliged to return north, being met by Isabella at Ancona, and brought home by slow stages up the rivers. When better he went to Venice at the end of November to report himself, and received a State welcome, with the great doors of S. Marco thrown open in his honour. But there had been secret voices against his reputation, and the blow came with dramatic suddenness when, in June of 1497, he was summoned to Venice, and reaching his house in San Trovaso, was met by the faithful Zorzo Brognolo, his agent, with the news of his dismissal from the post of Captain-General. There can be no

¹ *Vide* Cartwright, *op. cit.* Lorenzo spared no pains in this commission, telling her that "the form is everything" (*nella forma sta el tutto*), a saying in the true spirit of the Renaissance. He helped her also for the next twenty years, by his taste and knowledge, in the collections which she was now beginning to form.

doubt that for some time the terrible Council of Ten had been suspicious of their General's conduct ; and there is strong reason to think that the Marquis, apart from his generous sympathy with Montpensier in a fatal sickness, had been too responsive to the flattery and offers which from the first the French King and his envoys had showered upon him. If so, it was a dangerous game to play, for the Ten had its secret agents everywhere ; but he put a bold face upon it, and made his way along the Canal Grande to demand a hearing from the Signori. All his efforts to clear himself were useless : he was left unharmed as a " zentiluomo of Venice," inheriting her citizenship from his great ancestors,—but was advised to leave the city without further delay.

He returned to his villa of Gonzaga, declaring loudly that his disgrace was due to the intrigues of Lodovico of Milan and Galeazzo San Severino ; it was at this time that he adopted as his device the bundle of golden rods (*verghe*) and a crucible—which is still to be seen in the ceilings of the Reggia—with the legend "*Probasti me, Domine*" ("Thou hast proved me, O Lord"), alluding to his troubles and hopes to prove his innocence. But all his efforts at Venice were wasted ; and he seems to have consoled himself with uncertain offers of service from Duke Lodovico (who gave his real patronage to San Severino), and with the company of the charming Teodora, who appeared in splendid attire in a tournament held at Brescia in honour of Caterina, Queen of Cyprus—that island which had once been the realm of Venus herself—where the Marquis was not sorry to cross swords in the lists with his rival Galeazzo.¹

Those brilliant days of Isabella's earlier married life were over. In these last years of the century many dear friends, even among her own family, had been taken from her. First Ridolfo Gonzaga ; then Gianfrancesco, another uncle of the Marquis, Lord of Bozzolo and Sabbioneta and husband of her close friend the beautiful Antonia del Balzo² ; next the gallant young Ferrante, when he had but just recovered his realm of

¹ Cartwright, *op. cit.* ch. viii., states that this lady bore to the Marquis two daughters.

² Gianfrancesco Gonzaga left his children in the guardianship of their mother Antonia and his brother-in-law Bishop Lodovico ; and these Gonzaga princes of Sabbioneta and Bozzolo will claim a place in our later story.

Naples ; then her brother-in-law the Duc de Montpensier, and now—cruellest blow of all—her own beloved sister Beatrice d'Este, Duchess of Milan. Even the beautiful young Anna Sforza, with whom she had danced so merrily at her wedding, had died also in November of 1498, leaving her brother Alfonso d'Este a widower ; and the closing years of the century saw the cloud of danger from beyond the Alps darkening over the head of her bereaved brother-in-law Lodovico il Moro, Duke of Milan. Yet her character seemed to find a new strength of purpose within these troubled days. " You are blessed," said one candid critic to Francesco, " in having a fair, wise, and noble wife, a true mother of concord, ever anxious to gratify your wishes, while she prudently feigns not to see or hear those actions of yours which must be hateful to her." Amid the shifting and uncertain policy of her husband, at a time when old-established dynasties and princedoms were crashing down on every side, as in the yet darker days of war and invasion which were in store for Italy, she remained a pillar of strength to those around her ; and with her wonderful political instinct was to find salvation for her birthplace and her beloved Mantua, and to bring this city of her adoption and the Gonzaga dynasty at last in safety through the tempest.

CHAPTER VIII

ISABELLA D'ESTE DA GONZAGA

“**T**HERE was an almost universal conjecture,” writes the historian Guicciardini, “among the Italians that by the departure of King Charles all the regions of Italy were now delivered of the fears, affliction, and dangers which the power and nation of the French did threaten.” But this conjecture—he goes on to point out—had not been shared by the more thoughtful and prescient ; nor was it fulfilled in the succession of the Duke of Orleans as Louis XII—“to whom not only did appertain the inheritance of the realm of Naples, but he maintained that the Duchy of Milan was his freehold by succession of the Lady Valentina, his grandmother, who was married by John Galeaz Visconti to Louis, Duke of Orleans.”¹

Charles VIII had died at Amboise on April 7, 1498, on the very day when at Florence Savonarola was to make his ordeal by fire ; and Louis XII, when he succeeded, took, with that of King of France, the titles of Duke of Milan and King of Naples and Jerusalem ; and, having thus published his pretensions to the Duchy, lost no time in securing it by arms. The last year of the century saw the ruin of Lodovico Sforza growing nearer and more certain. While his friends were falling from him, and enemies plotting his destruction, Isabella remained faithful to her brother-in-law and old friend, while Francesco wavered, and actually accepted, on January 1

¹ Cf. Guicciardini, *op. cit.* Lib. iv. English by Geffray Fenton. Valentina Visconti, sister of Duke Filippo Maria and daughter of Gian Galeazzo, was married to the Duke of Orleans ; but the Imperial edict creating the Duchy (*vide* Sismondi) expressly excluded women from the succession. On the other hand, this equally barred the Sforza, who claimed through Bianca, natural daughter of Filippo Maria Visconti.

of that year, the baton and standard of the King of the Romans. Next month (February 1499) came the treaty between Venice and France, in which the destruction of Lodovico and partition of his dominions was determined. Louis once more crossed the Alps, while the Milanese General, San Severino, who was in command at Alessandria, "vilely abandoned that place";¹ without meeting the least resistance the French advanced from that side, and the Venetians towards Cremona. The Moro, seeing no other escape, fled to Germany with his treasure; and the great Milanese Dukedom of the Sforza and Visconti within twenty days had met its end.

The position of the North Italian States became perilous, and Francesco Gonzaga and Ercole d'Este began to fear for their own safety. The former, as usual, finessed, offered to King Louis his sword, and was actually present with Baldassarre Castiglione at that monarch's triumphal entry into Milan on October 6, receiving from him then the order of San Michael. With Isabella the instinct of the collector asserted itself; and while the French invaders of Milan were making havoc of the treasures of its Castello, of its tapestries, antique marbles, and paintings by Leonardo and his scholars, she was writing to Antonio Pallavicino, who had but just betrayed his master, begging him to secure for her the wonderful clavichord which Lorenzo di Pavia had made for her sister Beatrice.

But the French proved evil masters in Milan—"so that by reason of their robberies, violence, and oppression there came to her citizens the desire to return to the tyranny of the Sforza." The subtle Moro, watching from Germany, knew all this; and, hiring with his own treasure a great body of Swiss, suddenly descended into Italy; the people rose in his favour, and on February 5, 1500, he entered his own city in triumph. The French were driven out, after one year's possession; but the hireling Swiss for more money betrayed Lodovico, and handed him over a prisoner to his enemies, never again to escape their clutches. Trivulzio recovered Milan and the

¹ Cf. Volta, who from the Mantuan point of view says that Lodovico might have been saved, had he trusted instead to the Marquis. This from what followed, however, seems extremely doubtful.

Duchy for the French King, who in April sent the Cardinal de Rouen to rule as his governor.

There can be no doubt that the position of the Gonzaga and Mantua itself was one of great danger. Isabella had been a true friend to Lodovico throughout his troubles ; and, if she had used her chance as a collector, she had also received the Milanese exiles—among others two beautiful women, Cecilia Gallerani and Lucrezia Crivelli, who had occupied a place in Lodovico's affections and been deemed worthy of the brush of Leonardo. When the Moro had returned to his city in triumph, the first letter of welcome he had received had been from Isabella. In her enthusiasm she declared to Cardinal Ascanio Sforza that she longed to fly to Milan to fight against the French herself ; though the Cardinal had replied, markedly, that her husband's presence would be more useful. But Francesco would not commit himself too deeply at this juncture, and would only send his brother Giovanni with a troop of horse to join Lodovico before Novara ; and it was Giovanni Gonzaga who now rode alone, at full speed, to Mantua to bring the tidings of this latter's complete ruin. The Gonzaga was suspect among the French now back in Milan, and Isabella denounced as a " Sforzesca " ; and the Cardinal of Rouen had imposed a heavy fine on Francesco Gonzaga of 40,000 scudi, as well as on the Lords of Carpi, Correggio, and Mirandola, for being implicated in the recent rising and for helping the Moro—alleging also that noble persons hostile to France had taken refuge in Mantua. It needed at this moment all the Marchesa's diplomacy in the support of her husband to avoid a rupture ; and while Francesco, refusing submission to the fine, had sent his ambassador to King Louis in France,¹ he took occasion to fortify Mantua and its surroundings, encouraged by the support of her citizens—" disposed to defend their city against any attack on any occasion." But by degrees the danger passed away. The Marquis was released from his fine, to be confirmed in the service of France with a stipend of

¹ Equicola, a contemporary historian, states that Francesco went himself to the King in France—" not only to inform the King of the truth, but to maintain the liberty of his dominions," in reference to the charge of having given shelter to certain " unhappy gentlemen pursued by the French " ; and that he returned to his country with gifts and honours,

12,000 scudi ; and on May 17, 1500, another great consolation came to him in the birth of his first-born son, Federigo, whose very name seems to open to us a new vista in Mantuan story.

We have now with this new century—from 1500 onwards—to consider an entirely changed political condition within Italy. During the century preceding her destinies had been mainly controlled by what we may call the Great Five of her States—Milan, then become a Dukedom, the Republics of Venice and Florence, the Papal States, the kingdom of Naples. With the second and successful invasion of the French, and the consequent ruin of the Sforza, Milan ceased for ever to exist as an independent power in Italy ; she became abandoned in the years following to pillage, poverty, and foreign domination. Had the French followed up their first advantage by consolidating this conquest of Lombardy, they might have gradually annexed the whole Peninsula, which then lay helpless and divided before them ; but they were certain to have found, sooner or later, opposition from without, and the kingdom of Naples proved always a fatal lure to their ambition. On the other hand, at the moment we have now reached they seemed masters of the situation ; and the Borgia Pope, who had joined the League against them before the battle of Taro, now saw his best advantage on their side.

At this point I have to narrate, however briefly, the most extraordinary and appalling record of criminal ambition in all history, which I cannot here pass by, because it affects very closely the Gonzaga and their Mantua ; but there is no doubt that, without the consistent and armed support of King Louis XII, Cesare Borgia could never have attempted—much less carried through—his murderous career of political adventure. He had seen his chance, and—with that quick decision which was a great element in his success—had taken it from the very first. Sent by the Pope, his father, to the French Court to present to the Most Christian King the desired divorce and dispensation for this monarch's marriage with Anne of Brittany, he had been married by King Louis to Charlotte d'Albret, daughter of the King of Navarre, decorated—like the Gonzaga himself—with the Order of St. Michael, and had entered Milan at the French monarch's side. Even at this time there is on

doubt that both Francesco Gonzaga and his father-in-law, Duke Ercole, were becoming alarmed at these Borgia pretensions ; and Isabella, always diplomatic, sought to gain their friendship by inviting Cesare Borgia to become godfather to her newborn son Federigo—an invitation which he accepted with alacrity ; but to understand the nature of his schemes we must here go back a little further into his antecedents.

Among the numerous ladies to whom Alexander Borgia paid attention, the “ two Sultanas who ruled him during the greater part of his career ” were Vanozza Catanei and Giulia Farnese, called La Bella. Of his numerous children by Vanozza he made the elder son Duke of Gandia ; for the second he planned a career in the Church, and made Cesare Borgia Bishop of Valencia and then Cardinal ; while their sister, the beautiful and ill-famed Lucrezia, he had married to Giovanni Sforza, Lord of Pesaro. Finding this union not sufficiently important, the Pope Alexander divorced and re-married her to Alfonso, Prince of Bisceglia, a natural son of the King of Naples. But when this king lost his throne the Borgia, finding this alliance become worthless, had Alfonso stabbed on the steps of St. Peter’s, and finally strangled in his sick-bed by Cesare’s chief assassin Michelotto. Meanwhile another ghastly tragedy had taken place within the Borgia family itself. As narrated by Burchard, their contemporary at Rome, the young Duke of Gandia had supped at the house of Vanozza with his brother Cesare, then still Cardinal of Valencia, and had left him later in the night to visit a lady of their acquaintance ; he was never seen again alive, but his body was at length dragged out of the Tiber covered with numerous wounds. The Pope was overwhelmed at his loss, which all the evidence seems to show had been planned by Cesare ; but Alexander’s despair and remorse were short-lived, and a visit from Vanozza was enough to convince him that the interest of their family now lay with his second son—to whom he seemed henceforth bound as by some mysterious power, whom he released from his ecclesiastical honours and duties, and to whose ambitious schemes he then entirely devoted himself.

At the head of the Papal forces, with his French troops and with the powerful faction of the Orsini as his allies, Cesare

Borgia, now Duke of Valentino, entered Romagna with the deliberate purpose of despoiling and putting to death without mercy, one by one, the princely families who bore rule in that Umbrian borderland. Pesaro, Rimini, and Forli had shared this fate ; only at Faenza the young Prince Astorre Manfredi, a boy of eighteen of great personal beauty, supported by her citizens, made a gallant resistance.¹ Foiled here, and furious at this repulse—"having, besides the French forces, a very flourishing army of Italian captains and soldiers, since there were there Paolo and Giulio Orsini, Vitellozzo and Gian Paolo Baglioni, and many other chosen men, and having, with his unmeasured schemes, promised that neither sea nor mountains could hold them back"—Duke Valentino vowed to return, and take his vengeance. And now "Alessandro his father, in order that all his actions should correspond to one end, in this same year, 1500, had created to his disgrace twelve Cardinals, not for their merits but those who would offer him the highest price ; and also made great gain in Italy and the lands without from the Jubilee, then celebrated in Rome, with a great concourse of people, especially of foreigners."²

Duke Valentino, returning, had his revenge upon Faenza, which, cooling in her defence and seeing her cause hopeless, surrendered under safe conduct for her defenders and, above all, for her young prince. The citizens were spared ; but Astorre Manfredi, conducted to Rome in violation of this pledge, was there strangled in prison with his brother.³

¹ *Vide* Guicciardini : " *Le milizia da uno popolo . . . che non avera altro capo che un fanciullo.*" Machiavelli in his *Principe* gives (VII. *De Principibus Novis*) a brilliant analysis of the whole career of Cesare Borgia, whom he puts forward as a pattern (*ansi mi pare di preporlo imitabile*) to contemporary despots ; and fully approves his systematic murder of the princes he despoiled (*de' signori spogliati ne ammazzò quanti ne possé aggiungere*). No wonder that this book revolted the moral sense of Northern Europe.

² *Vide* Guicciardini, *op. cit.* Lib. iv.

³ " *Astorre, che era minore di 18 anni e di forma eccellente, cedendo l'età e l'innocenza alla perfidia e crudeltà del vincitore . . . non molto tempo poi condotto a Roma, saziata prima (secondo si disse) la libidine di qualcuno, fu occultamente con suo fratello naturale privato di vita.*" Bembo states that Astorre had taken refuge in the Rocca of Faenza, and surrendered to Valentino on condition that his life should be spared, but was sent to Rome, and soon after killed. The tragic story of this young prince is one of the blackest—even in the Borgia record,

After the taking of Faenza, Valentino, declared by the Pope, with the approval of his Consistory, Duke of Romagna, now advanced on Bologna, to despoil the Bentivoglio of that city ; but was suddenly checked in his advance by receiving orders from King Louis to go no farther, and to leave Giovanni Bentivoglio unharmed. There can be little doubt that the progress of the Borgia, who had now seized Piombino and threatened Tuscany, was being watched very closely and apprehensively at Ferrara and Mantua ; and we know, in fact, from her letters (1501), that the gallant resistance of Faenza, “ whose citizens, loyal and constant in their lord’s defence . . . have redeemed the honour of Italy,” had awakened Isabella’s warmest sympathy. At the same time both she and Francesco prudently sought to remain on good terms with Rome. The question of the Cardinal’s hat for Sigismondo was again resumed ; and there was even a proposal (1502) put forward by Cesare Borgia for the betrothal of his infant daughter by Charlotte d’Albret with Federigo, the two-year-old heir of the Gonzaga. At Ferrara the Borgia influence was even stronger ; for, after some natural hesitation, Alfonso d’Este, now a widower, had accepted for his wife the Pope’s daughter, Lucrezia, in spite of the Emperor’s disapproval and the black stories connected with her past ; and at the wedding, celebrated with great pomp and splendour at Rome and subsequently at Ferrara, Isabella d’Este was herself present, having come expressly to Ferrara at her father’s request.¹

During these troublous years of the early sixteenth century it is, however, evident that, apart from politics, two subjects filled the mind of this Mantuan Princess : one being her first-born son Federigo, whose earliest conversational efforts she reports minutely in her letters to her husband ; and the other her wonderful collection, which in these years was beginning to form itself as something unique in Italy and the world.

¹ Lucrezia, having seen her second husband strangled before her eyes, may have been quite content to get away from her family circle at Rome. I have traced her portrait (*Renaissance in Italian Art*, Part viii.) in the Appartamento Borgia at Rome—“ a blonde, with lovely and very long golden hair, a slim figure, and a charming mobile face.” At Ferrara, in better surroundings, she became a pattern of all the domestic virtues.



DETAIL OF MEDALLION



MARBLE DOORWAY IN PARADISO OF ISABELLA D'ESTE
IN THE DUCAL PALACE OF THE GONZAGA AT MANTUA



At this point a few words—especially to my readers who do not know Mantua—may be useful as to the “ locale ” of this collection. The Bonacolsi, in their hour of pride, seem to have possessed all the houses on the one side of the Piazza di S. Pietro (now Piazza Sordello) ; and had united these, by embattled bridges and great towers, to form a fortress-palace, secure against any attack. With their fall, this building came into the hands of the Gonzaga ; and within its walls it was that Ugolino Gonzaga had met his tragic end. But later we have seen that great builder, the first Francesco, to have constructed, for defence as well as residence, overlooking the Lake and dominating the Ponte S. Giorgio, the noble mediæval Castello, which still remains, and is being now admirably restored ; and it was here that Isabella d’Este seems to have spent the first years of her married life, and those happy days shared with Elisabetta of Urbino, and had her two “ studioli ” in a tower which overlooked the Lake.

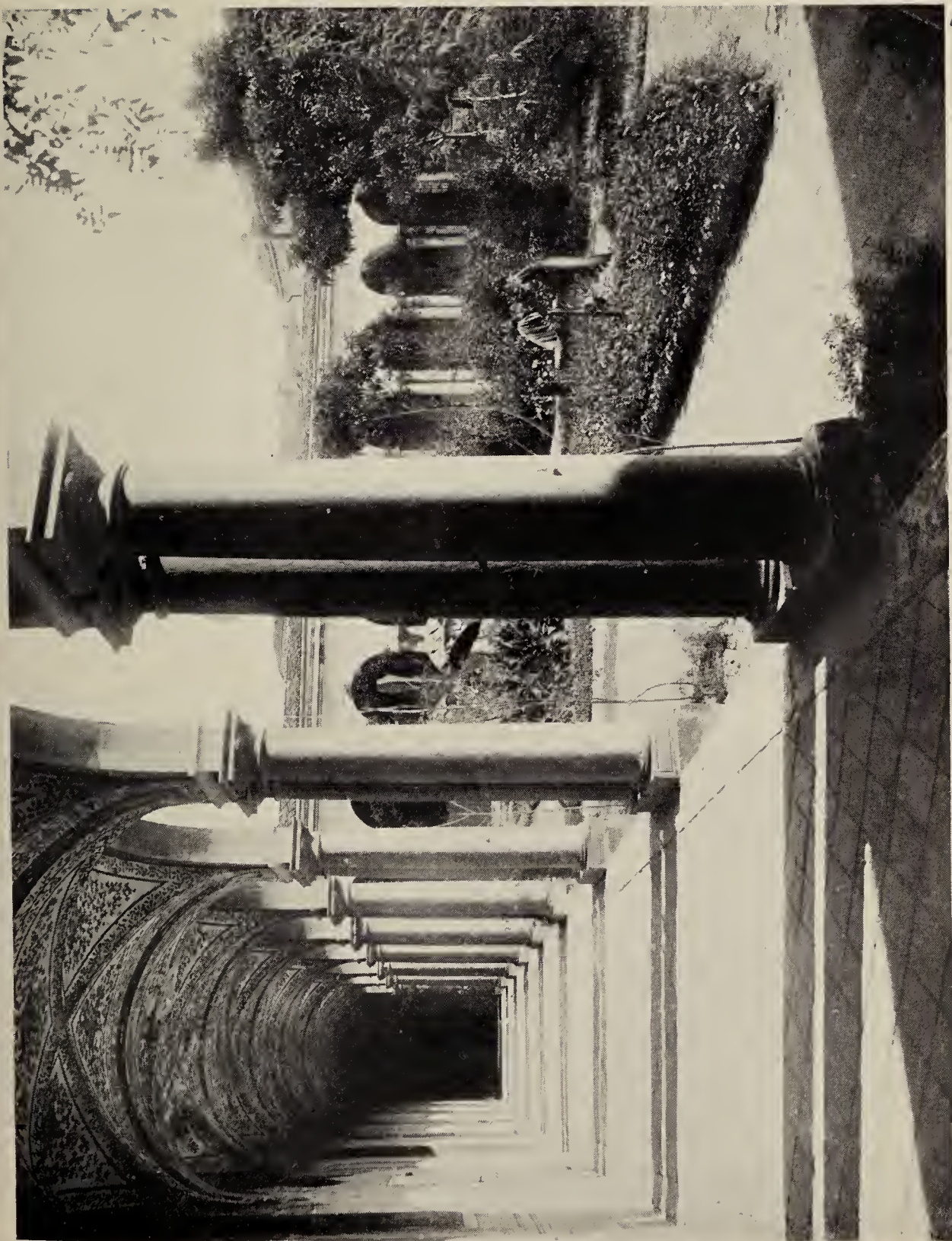
But she evidently found space lacking for her collection, and as early as 1496 was beginning to move some of her treasures to another apartment on the ground floor of the Corte Vecchia. It was later in her life—when she was a widow and found the stairs, from her growing stoutness, to become trying—that she definitely established her collection in the famous Grotta, which by degrees she came to fill with her gems, antiques, and paintings by the greatest Masters in Italy at that time. The magnificent series of cartoons of the “ Triumph of Cæsar,” now preserved in Hampton Court Palace, had been completed by Mantegna on his return from Rome, and are noted as being among the decorations of the Theatre of the Castello in February of 1501. But Isabella now commissioned and obtained from the same Master two noble tempera paintings for her beloved Grotta—the “ Parnassus ” or “ Triumph of Love ” and the “ Minerva chasing forth the Vices ”—as well as other subjects by Perugino and Lorenzo Costa, all of which are now in the Musée du Louvre.¹

In the terrible Sack of Mantua in 1630 by the Imperialists,

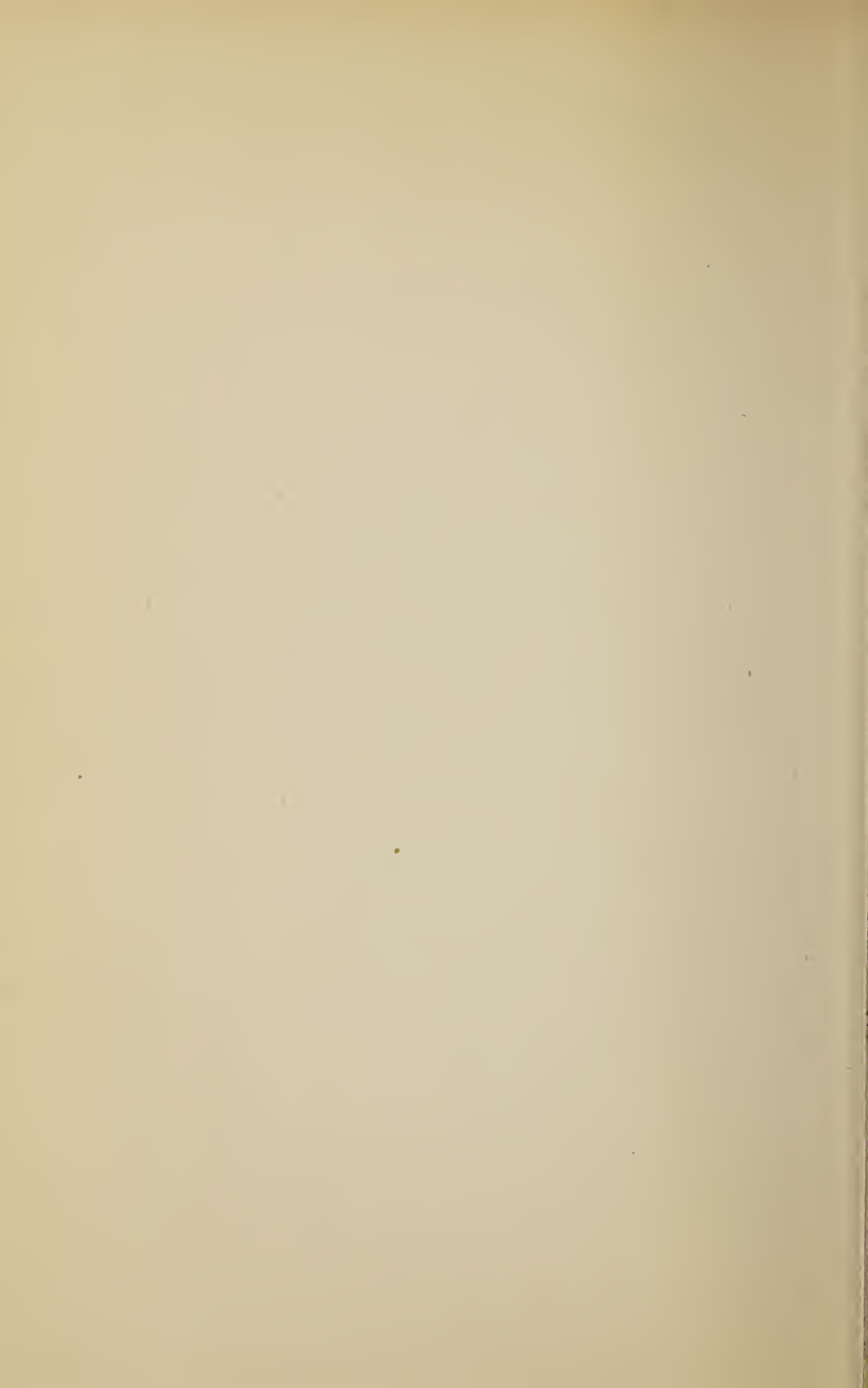
¹ These paintings were torn from the walls when the Grotta was looted in the Sack of Mantua, and came shortly afterwards, by purchase, into the hands of Cardinal Richelieu.

to which I shall come later in these pages, this whole collection—world-famed and unique, to whose formation Isabella had devoted the best years of her life—was looted, and its beautiful home, "*quel loco ch'el mondo la Grotta appella*," defiled and destroyed. But long before this her son Federigo Gonzaga and the later Mantuan Dukes had spread their immense palace over the whole of what is now called the Reggia, including the "magna domus"; and when Carlo de Nevers, Duke of Mantua, returned after the Sack to find his home a scene of desolation, he seems to have adorned that charming little apartment called the Paradiso, on the upper floor of the Reggia, with the remains of the ceilings, the tarsia work, and the exquisite marble doorways and tiled flooring from the ruined Grotta of Isabella d'Este, adding frequently his own name—"Carlo de Nevers" (eighth Duke) to the decorations. This delightful little apartment was always shown—as I found myself twenty years ago—as the Paradiso of Isabella d'Este, and in fact did contain some of the relics of her famous Grotta; though the imagination of visitors may have been, and may still be, misled into peopling these rooms with the memories of her magic presence. But when, in the Great War, after Caporetto, another Austrian advance was possible, if not imminent, these priceless relics of the Grotta were removed to Rome—their place being taken by the admirable copy shown in the Rome International Exhibition of 1911—and are now being carefully replaced in the restoration of the Grotta itself which, as I write these lines in Mantua, is being carried through.

I return now from this digression—essential here to my subject and also to clear up any misapprehension—to the story of Duke Valentino, now become master of Central Italy, and to his negotiations for a Mantuan alliance; when an event took place which must have opened the eyes of the Gonzaga and all Italy to his true character and intentions. In June of 1502 Isabella had gone to Porto with her little son and her sister-in-law and dearest friend, Elisabetta of Urbino, when news came to them that the Borgia Duke had suddenly and treacherously attacked Urbino itself, occupied the city with his troops, and put a price on the head of Duke Guidobaldo,



THE HANGING GARDEN (GIARDINO PENSILE)
IN THE DUCAL PALACE OF THE GONZAGA AT MANTUA



who escaped by a miracle to Mantua—"with nothing but my life, my doublet, and my shirt; such ingratitude and treachery," he adds in his letter to Cardinal della Rovere, "was never known." Clad in splendid armour, Cesare, Duke of Romagna, as he was now called, had entered Urbino on January 21, 1502, and had seated himself on the throne of her Dukes, and made short work of any malcontents; and for the next weeks a long line of mules descended the mountains, laden with paintings, tapestries, gold and silver plate, antiques, richly bound books and priceless manuscripts, the plunder—estimated at fully 150,000 ducats—of the famous Palace of the Montefeltri. Even at that moment Isabella, horrified at these tidings, full of tender sympathy for her sister-in-law and friend, and for the unfortunate Guidobaldo, could not resist the chance of adding to her collection. Among these treasures of that Palace of Urbino was a wonderful sleeping Cupid, carved in Rome by Michelangelo himself, and a very beautiful marble antique of Venus; and a timely request to Valentino through her brother, Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, secured these statues, which soon after arrived with their muleteer and a charming message from Valentino at Mantua, and were safely lodged in the Grotta.

All Italy was now either in alarm or fury at the Borgia advance, and when King Louis came to Milan in July (1502) he found a group of exasperated victims there to claim his redress—this very fact showing how dominant was the position of France throughout the peninsula at this period. But that ascendancy was no longer unchallenged. In the year previous (1501) the French had advanced on the Regno of Naples from the north and the Spaniards from the south, with a secret understanding to divide between them that unhappy kingdom. Capua was taken by the French, and its inhabitants massacred, and Federigo, King of Naples, finding resistance hopeless against such odds, surrendered to King Louis, and was carried to France; but the moment the conquest was completed jealousy arose between the two armies, and soon led to actual hostilities, in which the French were defeated by Gonsalvo de Cordova, their army destroyed, and Naples lost to them again. It was to recover this elusive inheritance that King

Louis had now recrossed the Alps and entered Milan—with Federigo of Aragon, the Marquis of Mantua and the Duke of Ferrara in his train—to find there, among others, Giovanni Sforza, once husband of Lucrezia Borgia and Lord of Pesaro, and the despoiled Duke of Urbino. They had fair words from King Louis, and Francesco Gonzaga supported strongly their just claims ; when suddenly Duke Valentino himself appeared—to completely regain his influence over the French monarch, nor did he take leave of him at Genoa until he had the promise of his support in Central Italy.

There can be no doubt that at this moment Isabella was terribly anxious for her husband's safety. Francesco Gonzaga was no coward, as we have seen at the Taro, and alone among his contemporaries dared to face the redoubtable Duke Valentino, whom he must have hated. He denounced him as a bastard and a priest's son, and told the Venetian envoy he would fight the Duke single-handed with sword and dagger, and deliver Italy from his clutches. But there were far deadlier weapons used by the Borgia against their enemies than either sword or dagger. "Being jealous for your life, which I count dearer than my own, and knowing your natural goodness leads you to take no precautions, I have made inquiries," wrote Isabella to her husband on July 23, on the day after she had received the Borgia gift of the statues—"and hear that you allow all manner of persons to serve you at table . . . so that I see it would be perfectly easy for any one to poison Your Excellency." And she adds in her own hand this postscript : "Dearest Lord, do not laugh at my fears, and say that women are cowards and afraid, because *their* malignity is far greater than my fears and your own courage." But the quarrel was patched up by the French King, to whose friendship Francesco possibly owed his security, and who took him back to spend Christmas with him in his Château at Loches ; while Valentino, secure in French support, with three hundred lances lent to him, returned to his career of conquest in Central Italy.

But now an unexpected event seemed to threaten those very conquests. He had carried them through with the support of the great Roman family of the Orsini—several of



DETAIL SHOWING HER DEVICE OF XXVII



CEILING IN PARADISO OF ISABELLA D'ESTE
IN THE DUCAL PALACE OF THE GONZAGA AT MANTUA

whom, as we have seen, were leaders in his army. But it seems to have occurred to these noble gentlemen at this time, after having seen one by one the little princedoms of Romagna annexed and their rulers removed to another world, that their own turn might—and, in fact, probably would—come next ; and in the Diet of La Magione Cardinal Orsini of Rome, Paolo his brother and the head of their House, Vitellozzo Vitelli, Lord of Città di Castello, Gian Francesco Baglione, Lord of Perugia, the Bentivoglio of Bologna and Oliverotto da Fermo took counsel to rid Romagna of its new tyrant. At the first news of the revolt Urbino, loyal to the House of Montefeltro, rose against the Borgia ; the rock fortress of S. Leo was recovered. The flame of resistance, with the old war-cry of “ Feltro,” spread throughout the Duchy ; and Guidobaldo, returning to his capital, was received by the whole population with a spontaneous outburst of affection.

The Borgia found himself in a difficult position, and is described by Machiavelli—who had been just then sent to him as envoy from the Signori of Florence—as full of alarm ; but “ the cruelty of Cesare Borgia was only equalled by his craft,” and, while waiting for reinforcements from France, he opened negotiations with the insurgent leaders, and succeeded to some extent in recovering their confidence. What follows is one of the most amazing pieces of successful treachery which is recorded in history. He had induced the Orsini chiefs to meet him and discuss terms of reconciliation at Sinigaglia, which their troops had recently taken and sacked, but which he had in the meantime filled with his own followers, arranging for their armies to be quartered outside. “ Then came the day arranged by Valentino at Sinigaglia, on which there went to meet him Paolo Orsini,” (his relation) “ the Duke of Gravina, Vitellozzo and Liverotto da Fermo ” (the Baglioni and Bentivoglio, suspecting treachery, had kept away), “ and were received with the greatest caresses, and accompanied by him as far as the gates of the city, before which they found drawn up all the troops of Valentino.”¹ Becoming suspicious at such a force, they tried to take their departure, but were

¹ *Vide* Guicciardini, *op. cit.* Lib. v. Nardi (*Historie Florentine*, Lib. iv.) gives also the whole ghastly story.

pressed by the Borgia to enter the city, on the excuse of completing their discussion, and were led to a room, where he took his leave on the plea of changing his dress ; but returned with his chief assassin, Don Michelotto, and his armed followers, and had Vitellozzo and Liverotto strangled before his eyes. The other Orsini chiefs were killed at his leisure in the next few days ; and the Pope, on hearing of his successful treachery, invited Cardinal Orsini to visit him in the Vatican, where the Cardinal himself and his relations were seized, his palace pillaged, and after a few weeks' imprisonment he died of poison ; while Cesare cut to pieces with his Gascons the troops of the insurgents, thus deprived of their leaders, and marched against the Baglioni and Pandolfo Petrucci—leaving Paolo Orsini and the Duke of Gravina to the noose of Michelotto—to carry fire and sword into the lands of Siena.

By treachery and armed force the Borgia were now masters of Central Italy, and at Rome had crushed the powerful faction of the Orsini. Their ambitious schemes seemed to have achieved the most complete success ; when, as if by a bolt from heaven from the hand of God Himself, they were suddenly struck down into utter nothingness. “ But see now,” writes the great Florentine historian, “ that at the height of their greatest hopes how vain and fallacious are the thoughts of men ! For the Pope from a vineyard near the Vatican, where he had gone to take supper, and refresh himself from the heat, was suddenly carried for dead into the Pontifical Palace, and immediately after him was carried in his son, as one dead ; and the day following, which was the 12th day of August ” (1503), “ the Pope was carried, according to ancient use, into the Church of St. Peter, black, swollen, and most horrible (*enfiato e bruttissimo*), with the most evident signs of poison, and Valentino, in the full vigour of his age, and having used at once most powerful antidotes to poison, saved his life, remaining oppressed by long and grave sickness.”

Then he gives the story which was soon over all Rome, of how the Pope had planned to poison Adrian, Cardinal of Corneto, using this means to despoil rich persons, Cardinals, and courtiers of their property ; and that Valentino had sent in advance certain poisoned flasks of wine, and given them

to a servant, who was ignorant of this, but had strict orders to give them to no one. But that the Pope, arriving before the supper, and overcome with thirst from the great heat, had asked for a drink, and was given this by the servant as wine of choice quality—" *come vino più prezioso* "—and while he was drinking, Valentino arrived and partook of the same wine. " All Rome with incredible gladness ran together to that dead body of Alexander in San Pietro, some among then unable to satisfy their eyes with seeing this extinction of a serpent (*di vedere spento un serpente*), who, with his unbounded ambition and pestiferous perfidy, and with every example of horrible cruelty and monstrous lust and unheard-of avarice, selling without distinction things sacred and profane, had poisoned all the world." ¹

Duke Valentino only recovered to find the city in a ferment, his well-laid plans frustrated, his nerve and decision for ever gone, to be taken later a prisoner to Spain ; and the Marquis of Mantua, marching south with La Trémouille at the head of the French armies, halted his troops without the walls of Rome, and sent thence to his wife, under date of September 22, 1503, a remarkable letter which has been preserved. " In his last sickness the Pope talked in such a way that those who did not know what was in his mind thought him wandering, though he spoke with great feeling ; and his words were, ' I will come ; it is but right ; wait yet a little while.' Those who were in his secret explained that after the death of Innocent, while the Conclave was sitting, he bargained with the devil for the Papacy at the price of his soul. . . . And when he was dead the body commenced to boil (*il corpo cominciò a bollire*), his mouth to foam like a pot upon the fire, and so continued while he was above ground. He swelled so much that there was no more shape of a human body, nor difference in his length or breadth. He was carried to his grave with little honour, his body being dragged from the

¹ *Vide* Guicciardini, *op. cit.* The Venetian Sanudo confirms the statement that poison was taken by mistake ; but Burchard only mentions malignant fever, and other sources apoplexy. As Symonds has remarked, on the one side we have Burchard's testimony, on the other, the consent of all contemporary historians, with the single exception of Machiavelli ; who, however, was, as we have seen, an admirer and intimate of Valentino.

bed by a ' facchino ' with a cord fastened to his feet, because no one would touch him." After a stormy Conclave and the brief Papacy of Pius III, that inveterate enemy of the Borgia Cardinal della Rovere, as Julius II, came to rule the Church in their place ; and their crimes and ambition were blotted out of the story of Italy.

We may sometimes be tempted to think when we see men, stained with innocent blood, remaining in power to enjoy the fruits of their crimes, that God's ears have grown deaf—His justice too long delayed. But that judgment is not ours to make ; and I have seen in my own knowledge of life—as we shall see yet again in these very pages—that His mills may be slow, but grind exceeding small. Ten years ago, when crossing the arid plains of Castile in the burning heat of July, I paused awhile before that grim fortress of Medina del Campo ; and my thoughts went back to this Valentino, imprisoned there for years like some dangerous beast, haunted by the memories of vain ambition and horrible useless crimes—only to perish later in some obscure and nameless conflict.

The campaign upon which Francesco Gonzaga now entered in the Kingdom of Naples did not add greatly to his military fame. He had to face in the Spanish leader, Gonsalvo, one of the greatest Captains of the age ; and his own French troops were undisciplined, and jealous of any Italian command. He succeeded, indeed, in relieving Gaeta, and forcing the Spanish troops to retire behind the Garigliano ; but an attempt to cross that river cost him many of his Mantuan knights, and, disgusted with the insubordination of the French troops, he sent to King Louis to resign his command. A few weeks after his departure, on December 28, 1503, the French were completely defeated by Gonsalvo, losing many of their leaders. Gaeta was surrendered ; and the claim to Naples definitely abandoned by King Louis.

The year 1505 saw peace signed between the Emperor Maximilian, Spain, and France—a peace which, unhappily for Italy, was not long to remain. The new Pope, Julius II, was friendly to the Gonzaga, and by the help of Elisabetta, Duchess of Urbino—now returned with her husband to their Dukedom—a marriage was arranged between Leonora Gonzaga, eldest

daughter of the Marquis, and Francesco della Rovere, heir to Guidobaldo ; while the Cardinal's hat, so long desired for Sigismondo Gonzaga, brother of the Marquis, was at last conferred upon him. At the same time the warlike and ambitious Pontiff employed Francesco Gonzaga, as Captain-General of his armies, to drive the Bentivoglio from Bologna, and annex that ancient city to the Papal dominions. The same year (1506) saw the death at Mantua of the great painter, Mantegna. In his last years pecuniary difficulties had closed around the old man, and embittered his last days. "There was no way of meeting those difficulties save by breaking up his beloved collection, the treasures of his lifetime ; and the forced sale of its greatest ornament, the bust of Faustina, which he parted with only a month before his death to Isabella d'Este (who does not shine in this transaction), is said to have broken the old man's heart." His place at Mantua was taken by Lorenzo Costa, a painter of interest but not of the same significance.¹

The little States of Romagna had been recently left by the Borgia invaders bereft in many cases of their rulers, disorganized, and offering an easy prey to any new invaders. Venice, in her mistaken and dangerous policy of mainland aggression, had already seized Ravenna from its ancient family of the Polenta ; and now, after the fall of Valentino, annexed Faenza and Rimini, though offering to pay to Rome her wonted tribute from these States. But Pope Julius had no idea of parting with any of his possessions. He demanded from Venice restitution of all that she had taken, and, failing to obtain this, joined (December 10, 1508) with King Louis and the Emperor Maximilian in the famous (or infamous) League of Cambray, for the destruction of the Most Serene Republic and the dividing of all her possessions on "terra ferma," bringing into this compact—by promises of accession to their territories—both the Gonzaga at Mantua and the Este at Ferrara. The Republic of Venice was then the one free city of Italy whose soil had not been trodden by the invaders, nor

¹ *Vide* my "Humanism in Art," ch. i. (*Renaissance in Italian Art*, Part iv.) The correspondence on the subject of the Faustina is given by Cartwright from D'Arco, and is very pathetic. On his last picture Andrea had inscribed the words, "*Nil nisi divinum stabile est—cætera fumus.*"

her resources impaired ; while her immense riches made her a tempting prey. There can be no doubt that Marquis Francesco, who had an old grudge against the Senate of Venice for his abrupt and final dismissal from her service, was deeply implicated in this whole scheme of attack and spoliation ; and he was in command of the troops which now drove back the Venetian General Alviano from Casalmaggiore, and joined the King of France and the armies of the League on the river Adda.

Attacked by her enemies on every side, Venice made a splendid and desperate resistance ; but after the disastrous battle of Ghiara d'Adda she lost her cities of Cremona, Bergamo, Brescia, Verona, Vicenza, Padua, and many other lands and castles. " Yet," says our chronicler, " did not the Senate of Venice lose heart, being also helped by the divisions which arose among the Allies, especially between the King of France and the Emperor, and these gave her time to reorganize her armies and recover Padua." We come now to a misadventure which affected the war itself, and the share in it of the Gonzaga. For being summoned to the help of Verona by the Bishop of Trento, Governor there for the Emperor, and finding the German troops had not arrived, Francesco Gonzaga rode on for the night with only fifty French lances and a hundred men-at-arms to Isola della Scala ; and was there captured in the night by the Venetians, who took him completely by surprise. Carried from Legnano to Padua, his capture was there a subject of public rejoicing, and Sanudo says that when he entered Venice all Piazza S. Marco was full of people crying, " Hang the traitor ! Turco preso ! " He was kept a close prisoner within a tower (*torrizella*), but was given service and medical attention. " The Marchesa Isabella," we are told, " who loved him tenderly, was deeply affected, but did not give way to excessive grief and female desperation ; and aided by the counsel of Sigismondo, brother of the Marquis, and Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, who had come expressly to Mantua at this crisis, she proclaimed her son Federigo as Marquis, and herself assumed the Regency." ¹ Her direction of the State in this crisis was

¹ See Volta, *op. cit.*, as well as the admirable monograph on this period—*La Reggenza di Isabella d'Este, durante la Prigionia del Marito (1509-1510)*, by Alessandro Luzio.

indeed admirable, and to some one who at Venice had scornfully offered "Welcome to the Lord Marquis of Mantua," Francesco had finely (and justly) replied: "He whom you speak to is Francesco di Gonzaga, and the Marquis of Mantua is at present in Mantua." But his letters to his wife—in whom he had such just confidence, and to whose care he specially commends his falcons, his dogs, and his painter, Lorenzo Costa, then at work in the palace at S. Sebastiano—show how deeply he had felt this blow; and are described by Dr. Luzio—perhaps somewhat too severely—as "really howlings of a sick dog on a chain."

Isabella spared no effort to procure the release she so longed for, seeking the intervention of the King of France, the Emperor, and the Pope, and, obviously with the view of securing the latter's support, pushing forward the marriage of her daughter Leonora with Francesco della Rovere, which took place in Mantua in December of 1509. But the release was constantly deferred; and the political difficulties needed all her experience and diplomacy to cope with at this time. The jealousy between the French King and the Emperor, which was to result in their duel to the death for domination, with Italy as their battleground, was beginning to show itself. While the Marquis changed his course with every wind, Isabella, with far deeper prescience, seems to have, from the first to last, clung to that Imperial connexion which was actually a part of the tradition of Casa Gonzaga, and in so doing—if a sporting phrase may for once here be permitted—eventually "spotted the winner." Meanwhile her husband was getting more and more angry, and disposed to blame her for the delay in his release; while both the Emperor and King Louis were suggesting to Isabella that it might be well for the security of Mantua to be occupied for the time being by their troops, and that her son Federigo should be brought up in one of their Courts.¹

To both requests Isabella opposed a deferential but not less determined resistance; and the language used by Francesco with reference to his wife, when the letter was brought to him giving her reasons for that refusal, does not raise our

¹ Cf. A. Luzio, *op. cit.*

opinion of his character.¹ Federigo—whom we left in his first efforts to walk, and referring to his warlike parent as “Ti Pa”—had now grown into a beautiful lad, whose long curls and oval face Raffaello was soon to paint, and was the very apple of his mother’s eye. Her refusal to part with him was based on good political reasons, as well as maternal affection. But at last she had to give him up to no other than the Pope himself, when the imperious old Pontiff insisted on this as the condition of her husband’s freedom: in fact, by his letter to the Emperor, “*propter captivitatem, atque detentionem dilecti filii nobilis viri Francisci MM.*,” and by a yet more peremptory letter to Venice, the desired release was at length accomplished. For Julius II, having brought back the foreign armies into Italy, had begun—though, like the Moro, too late—to regret his hasty action: “somewhere in the depth of his soul,” says Gregorovius, “a voice kept telling him that, with the destruction of Venice, Italy would become the prey of the stranger, of the Barbarian, and the Holy See itself lose its independence.” With the impetuous energy of his temperament he suddenly changed his policy (1510) and formed a league, called the Holy League, against France, with the aid of the Swiss and with Venice, Spain, and England as his allies, and himself led his troops to the attack with the warlike cry of “*Fuori i Barbari!*” The Spaniards advanced in force from Naples to his support; the war became general through Italy; and the bloody battle of Ravenna, which left twenty thousand dead on the field, cost the French their leader Gaston de Foix, and eventually led to their expulsion from Italy.

In these disastrous wars which cost Italy her independence—for, if she escaped from the French, it was only to find worse masters in the Spaniards and Germans—in this collision of world-powers Mantua took no direct part, happy if she could save her territory from being overrun by the contending forces. The vacillating policy of Marquis Francesco had placed him in

¹ It had been suggested that Federigo should take his father’s place at Venice as hostage—a proposal which Isabella refused (Mantua, 13th May 1510) in a letter full of good sense and dignity. When this letter was brought to Francesco at Venice, still in bed and having slept badly, he exclaimed: “*Io mil pensava, poichè eri non vene nulla, quella putana di mia moier e sta causa,*” weeping and complaining. Vide Luzio, *op. cit.*

a position of being at one and the same time Gonfaloniere of the Church and Captain of the Emperor, the King of France, and the Republic of Venice ; and, as he could not serve one without quarrelling with the others, he—perhaps wisely—remained neutral, and devoted himself to trying to guard his frontiers and preserving the security of his subjects. Then came the death of Pope Julius II (1513), and the consequent return home of Federigo Gonzaga, to the great happiness of his parents ; while the election of the Medici Pope, Leo X, was favourable to the Gonzaga. On the first day of the year 1515 Francis I succeeded Louis XII as King of France, and once more the French armies descended into Lombardy. The Marquis remained neutral, but could not hinder the troops of Venice from overrunning the Serraglio, and lost Peschiera and Asola without power to resist ; while Urbino was again invaded by the Papal armies, and the Duchess Elisabetta, with Leonora and her husband, now Duke of Urbino, took refuge in Mantua. His health had been failing, and in March of 1519 the Marquis, seized by a fever, passed away in his palace at S. Sebastiano, with his wife Isabella, his children, including the young Duchess of Urbino, and his brother, Cardinal Sigismondo, beside him. He was only fifty-three years of age, but had led a hard and strenuous life. A brave man and a good soldier, sharing all the hardships of his men, he can scarcely be considered a great general or tactician, and in his political conduct he owed much to the keener insight and untiring devotion of his wife. Clad in white, on April 3, 1519, Federigo Gonzaga, then nineteen years of age, went to the Cathedral and was recognized by the people as their Lord and Marquis ; there followed solemn functions for his father's memory in S. Francesco, and next year came to him his investiture from the Emperor Charles V, with rights over Peschiera and Sermione.

The Emperor Charles V, who, already King of Spain, had just inherited (1519) the States of Austria, the two Sicilies, the Low Countries, and Burgundy, became at once the most powerful monarch in Europe ; and the duel for power in Italy between France and the Empire now entered on its final and most terrible form. Isabella d'Este, as we have seen, had favoured the cause of the Emperor, the traditional suzerain

of Mantua ; and when the French General Lautrec (1522) fell suddenly on Pavia and besieged it, it was her son Federigo, with only 2000 infantry and 300 horse, who saved the city for the Empire, forestalling every enemy attack and fighting beside his men with great courage, until at length the Cæsarean reinforcements arrived and Lautrec had to retire to Monza. Determined to win back the city of Pavia, King Francis attacked it again with a most powerful army in the winter of 1524, but made yet again—though past disasters might here have warned him—the fatal error of dividing his forces, in order to try and recover the kingdom of Naples. With his armies thus weakened, but obstinately continuing the siege through the winter, he was attacked on February 25, 1525, by Pescara, commanding the Imperialists ; and after a murderous battle was totally defeated and himself taken prisoner.

The duel between France and the Empire, with Italy as their battleground, had thus ended. Charles V was left the master, but the whole country was overrun by ferocious hordes of marauding troops ; while the Constable Charles de Bourbon, with the Emperor's approval and encouragement, had gathered at Pavia an army of 25,000 of these banditti, with the avowed object of plunder, and with Florence and Rome marked down for this purpose. " In this time," says the chronicler, " our country did not escape the consequences of war, pillaged from time to time in different parts of its territory, its crops devastated, compelled to give free passage to the ' soldatesca ' of either side, and offer them supplies when required " ; while Marquis Federigo found himself in the difficulty of reconciling his position as Captain of the Papal armies and feudatory of the now all-powerful Emperor Charles V.

In the year 1525 Isabella d'Este had decided on a visit to Rome. Various reasons had influenced her in making this prolonged and important visit—not the least perhaps, though less openly acknowledged, being her position at this time at home. Her adored son, Federigo, had fallen a victim to the charms of the beautiful Isabella Boschetti, who, triumphant in her youth and charm of sex, ruled now over the Gonzaga Court, usurping the place which Isabella herself so long had held. Giovio describes her young rival and namesake as

riding forth through the city, accompanied by an obsequious crowd of courtiers, while the Marchesana Isabella was deserted, save for one or two noble old gentlemen who would never abandon her ; and even her old secretary Mario Equicola—to whose *History of Mantua* I have often referred—seems to have been among those who turned to worship the rising sun. If she then sought to escape this galling slight—to make her absence felt, her presence again needed—there was also an open and more direct reason for Isabella's lengthy stay in Rome. There had been hopes, on the death of Leo X, of the election of Cardinal Sigismondo to the Papacy ; and certainly a Gonzaga Pope would have made a better figure at Rome than the uncultured northern Adrian VI. But, failing then, Sigismondo had given all his influence to elect the Medici Pope, Clement VII; and Isabella, who had already in view the Cardinalate of her beloved son Ercole, tells the Cardinal of Mantua quite frankly that she would have preferred him as Pope, because “ we should then be sure of the honours which now are less certain.” The lamented death of Cardinal Sigismondo, in October of 1525, practically assured the election of Ercole, which was promised by the Pope in person to Isabella when she made him her visit of condolence—“ seeing that your own merits deserve it, which shall be done all the more willingly in that we know that Ercole is full of letters and virtuous.” This binding promise was actually fulfilled in the year following (1526), though it was kept for the time being, at the Pope's special request, as a secret.

At that time the weak and changeful policy of this Pope—who made fresh plans every hour, even suggested in these “ *aegri somnia* ” to Federigo Gonzaga the Duchy of Milan and the Crown of Naples, and had joined a league with the King of France, Venice, and Francesco Sforza—gave constant offence and alarm to the Emperor, who held Bourbon's army in the north over him as a threat of punishment. Isabella herself, in her letters from Rome to her son Federigo, is always strongly against his committing himself to any armed action against the Emperor, his suzerain. When Leo X had conferred on Federigo the Captaincy of his armies, he had expressly inserted, as a condition of his service, that he would be ready to march

against any enemy whatever, even the Emperor. But it seems clear that, by a trick, this valuable document had been recovered at Leo's death, for money down, by a secretary, Ardighello, who "handed it to Madama" (Isabella) "and she immediately destroyed it"; and after some negotiations Pope Clement weakly consented—seeming to have feared and hated even more the Duke of Urbino—that the Gonzaga should remain as paid Captain of his forces, with the uncertainty of how far he could depend on him in case of an Imperialist attack.¹

Meanwhile, the storm in the north was slowly gathering, the fate of the devoted city—that wonderful Rome of the Renaissance—becoming more and more certain; and looking back on this time it seems that the very forces which might have saved her were gradually, as by some invisible hand, turned aside; as if the doom of those terrible deeds, those orgies of lust and blood which we have merely touched on in this very chapter, was destined in those days to be fulfilled. For at this time all that lack of unity, of love for their common country, all that selfishness and folly which had already ruined Italy become more than ever apparent. Federigo Gonzaga, had he so willed, could have not merely blocked but annihilated the ill-disciplined bands of Spaniards and German Lanzknechts, entangled on their march south among the river fortresses of his Serraglio. He not only did not do this, but gave them boats, provisions, every assistance and encouragement to get them well out of his own country; and is even considered by his orders to have contributed directly to the defeat and death of Giovanni de' Medici—whom he hated as a rival in arms—who was brought a dying man into Mantua " . . . that valorous warrior with whom perished the last hope of Italy." But if this were the case with Marquis Federigo, what shall we say of his neighbour and kinsman, Alfonso d'Este, who actually supplied to these hordes of Frundsberg and Bourbon the artillery of which they were badly in need? or yet again of Francesco Maria, Duke of Urbino, who, in command of the armies of the League, had made no effort to save Rome,

¹ Luzio (*Isabella d'Este, Sacco di Roma*) gives in detail this extraordinary correspondence.

and held back his troops even when the enemy was within her gates ? ¹

To complete this picture of selfish cowardice, indifference and folly, we have only to return to Pope Clement VII himself. He had received young Ercole Gonzaga, called to Rome expressly by his mother to receive the mysterious "bolla" of his Cardinalate from the hand of His Holiness himself; who, perhaps recognizing the boy's exceptional intelligence, seems to have talked to him freely of his plans of leaving Italy, to effect a reconciliation between France and Charles V, which seem to us, after what happened later, only among the vain visions, the "*aegri somnia*" to which I have alluded. In the meantime he failed to recognize either the perfidious friendship of the Gonzaga and the Este, the terrible loss to himself and to Italy in Giovanni de' Medici's death, or the near peril to Rome in the march south of the Constable de Bourbon and his horde of mercenaries.

But Federigo Gonzaga was himself under no such illusion. He had passed on Frundsberg and his Lanzknechts with every kindly attention out of the Mantovano, but his mother, to whom he was devoted, still lingered in Rome; and on November 26, 1527, he wrote, begging her to get out of that city at all cost, to go where she liked—to Urbino, Pesaro, Venice, if Mantua failed to attract her—before these Lanzknechts, "*una bella banda*," held Rome for their prey. Her reply (December 5) only shows that she too had the same illusions as the Pope with regard to the danger of the city, that she disliked the prospect of a winter journey by bad roads, that she had information "that His Holiness is disposed to come to an agreement with the Emperor"; and while she and others were still in their fools' paradise, while Clement VII was even declining military assistance—suddenly the enemy was at their gates.

¹ Guicciardini, who was with the Duke of Urbino's army, wrote: "I am no General, and do not understand the art of war, but I may tell you that if, when the news of the capture of Rome reached us, we had pressed on to the relief of the Castello, we should have released the Pope and Cardinals, and might have crushed the enemy and saved the unhappy city. But all the world knows what our haste has been" (*Op. inedite*, vol. ix., quoted by Cartwright). In his *History of Italy* (Lib. xviii.) he gives the story of the Sack of Rome, and shows us the Duke of Urbino, at last within striking distance of that city, holding a council of officers at Orvieto to discuss whether, should he fail to relieve the Castello, his retreat would be secure.

The sculptor Cellini was then in Rome, and has left us, in the story of his life, a terrible word-picture of the scenes he himself had lived through and witnessed. He tells us (and it seems quite possible) that it was a shot from his trusted arquebus which had brought down and killed the Constable de Bourbon as he was storming the gates of Rome; and how then he had found it "wisest to seek refuge in the Castel S. Angelo, crowding with others into the gateway just as Pope Clement was entering the Castello by the corridor from the Palace of St. Peter"; at the very moment, too, that the Spaniards had forced the walls, and were driving the city troops under Renzo da Ceri down the Lungara to the Ponte Sisto with the cries of "Eviva Spagna! Ammazza! Ammazza!"¹ Then began the horrors of the Sack; for the brutal soldiery, all discipline at an end, now ravaged the city at their will. "Churches and convents, palaces and houses, were invaded and rifled; resistance was punished with fire and sword; rape and murder were the fate of the inhabitants." "Alas!" writes one, who was probably a witness, "how many courtiers, gentlemen, and prelates, how many devout nuns, matrons, and maidens became a prey to these savages! What chalices, images, crucifixes were torn from the altars! . . . what holy relics dashed to the ground with blasphemy by these brutal Lutherans!" The streets exhibited heaps of rich furniture, vestments and plate—all the wealth and splendour of the Roman Court pillaged by the basest ruffians.² And Guicciardini tells us of the suffering of many prelates taken by the soldiers—especially by the German foot-men (*fanti Tedeschi*), who hated the name of the Roman Church—mounted by them on vile beasts, and led through all Rome in the dress of their office with every form of insult, many dying under these torments, and others having paid a high ransom only to perish in a few days.³

For seven months the doomed city was abandoned to these horrors, to which the plague was soon added; the only

¹ *Vide* my "Rome of the Renaissance," ch. vi. (*Renaissance in Italian Art*, Part ix.).

² *Vide* Denistoun, *Memoirs of the Dukes of Urbino*, Book vi. ch. xxxix.

³ *Vide* Guicciardini, *Istoria d'Italia*, Lib. xviii.

buildings which escaped being the Castel S. Angelo—where the Pope and his Cardinals had taken refuge—and (for a time) the Palace of the Cancelleria, occupied by Cardinal Colonna, and the Palazzo Colonna in Piazza SS. Apostoli, where Isabella d'Este had been staying, since June of 1525, as guest of that great Roman family. From the windows of that palace “Isabella d'Este and her ladies looked down on these awful scenes. They heard the agonizing shrieks of the women and the groans of the dying, and, over all, the sullen booming of the guns of S. Angelo.” Here they waited in terrible suspense through the long hours, expecting at any moment that their own doom might come; till at ten o'clock of that night of the Sack, Ferrante Gonzaga, Isabella's youngest son, who had returned from Spain and taken service in the Imperial armies, gained entrance—thankful to find his mother alive and still unharmed. Many had taken refuge with her, trusting to her great name and influence for protection in that awful moment; and it is to the credit of that great-hearted woman that, though their presence added very greatly to her own danger, she would not refuse them shelter. A letter of this time refers to “the pity (*pietà*) shown by the aforesaid Madama in gathering into that place more than 1200 Roman ladies and 1000 men”; and in the letter of Francesco Gonzaga, one of her servants, we get some conception of these scenes of horror.¹ We see there Isabella herself, heard often to cry aloud for death, in the midst of a terrified and distracted crowd—ladies who had escaped these savages in their petticoat alone (*in semplice gonella*), ambassadors, ecclesiastics, patri-cians, who only begged to be allowed to pass among her servants—clinging to her as their last hope of safety, amid the howlings of her pet dwarf, Morgantino, who would never leave her side. But even then we find her guiding, helping where she could, keeping her courage and high spirit—meriting more than ever, in that terrible moment of her life, the epithet so often given to her of “magnanimous.”²

¹ *Vide* Luzio, *op. cit.*

² The Humanist Pontanus once regretted that he had not given this “royal lady” a place in his book, *De Magnanimitate*; and here I cannot resist mentioning an episode in the earlier period of Isabella's Regency. A “*villano*” (serf) had come into her hands, who was claimed back by his master, Oddo

By Ferrante's intervention it was arranged that the Marchesa and her followers should leave Rome without ransom, though the other refugees had to pay down 60,000 ducats ; and, with a safe-conduct from the Prince of Orange, she was able to leave the city for Ostia, and, after great sufferings from storms, and narrowly escaping being taken by pirates, came at last by way of Pesaro to Ferrara, and thence to Mantua. At that happy moment of her return all past misunderstandings were forgotten and forgiven. Her first visit had been to S. Andrea, to offer service and thanks to the Precious Blood of Christ. " No such day of gladness in this city," says her servant, Tridapale, " have I yet seen in my life, and certainly Madama this time has been fully assured of the love borne to her by her own two sons and all this most faithful people ; so that I and others, her servants, could not hold back our tears. And all that one heard was the sound of bells and voices of those around crying out ' Isabella.' "

d'Incise ; and the wretched man, knowing what awaited him, had implored her not to give him up. His master, enraged, wrote to Isabella : " It seems to me you should think more of me than of ' villani.' " To the Marquis Incise she replied : " It did not seem good to us to send that poor man to the peril of death, for if he is ' villano ' he is none the less a man (*e perho homo*) ; and we, having him in our power, ought to have compassion on him as a man." When we consider the frightful treatment of serfs in those times—less than animals, mutilated, killed at their lord's caprice—these three words "*e perho homo*" are an immortal tribute to their writer's high view of life—her magnanimity.

CHAPTER IX

GIULIO ROMANO AT MANTUA

A PLEASANT land, set high between the Alps and those fertile plains of Lombardy, rich in grain, with vineyards upon its hillsides—the famed “*colline Monferrini*”—which are often crowned by some ancient castle or little township famed in art and story, the homes of a fighting race. Such was the Marquisate of Monferrato, which now came to be united for good and for ill with Mantua, through the marriage of Federigo Gonzaga with Margherita, daughter and sole heiress of its Marquis; and herself descended from that ancient royal House of the Palaeologi, now driven from Byzantium by the Ottoman Turk.

For now, after the Sack of Rome, had come the great settlement of Italy, when Pope and Emperor had met at Bologna to divide between them what was left of the mangled remains of that unhappy country. The French had finally been driven back across the Alps; the Papacy had been taught its lesson, had been chastised with whips of red-hot steel, but was now to be restored; and Italy—bleeding with many wounds, but still beautiful, desirable—lay prostrate at the all-powerful monarch’s feet. Charles V was to have come to Bologna from Parma by way of Mantua, and Marquis Federigo had been preparing his reception; but he finally chose the more direct route of Reggio and Modena. Isabella d’Este had arrived on November 1, 1529, at Bologna, for the coronation ceremonies, and taken up her residence in the Palazzo Manzoli, close to the Church of S. Giacomo, and not far from the leaning towers of the Galisenda and Asinelli—accompanied by a brilliant train of beautiful women. She was to be joined soon after by her son Federigo, and “her quarters,” we are

told, "obtained no good fame in the following months, for the ladies of her suite were liberal of favours. Jousts, masquerades, street brawls, and duels were of frequent occurrence beneath her windows, Spaniards and Italians disputing the honour of those light amours."¹

On November 5 the Emperor Charles made his triumphal entry into the city, preceded by his Spanish and Burgundian troops, among whom Antonio de Leyva, the cruel Spanish Governor of Milan, a martyr to gout, was carried upon a litter of purple velvet; while the Emperor himself rode, fully armed and holding the sceptre, attended by twenty-four pages, and with his Spanish and Northern grandees—among whom were his Grand Marshal the Marquis of Astorga, the Count of Nassau, and the Marquis Bonifazio of Monferrato. The Pope was waiting upon a throne erected before San Petronio; and while the Emperor knelt to kiss his feet, Clement VII bent down, and with streaming eyes saluted him upon the cheek. The actual coronation, when Charles V assumed both the iron and the golden crowns, did not take place until February 24 of the year following, within San Petronio; but the intervening time was fully occupied in the settlement of the affairs of Italy—a settlement which marks definitely the end of the great Renaissance period and the beginning of a new era, and which affected very deeply the future of Mantua.

For now that steadfast support of the Emperor, which had been the key-note of Isabella's later policy, the gallant defence by her son of the besieged Pavia, and his less admirable courtly connivance at the descent of Bourbon's banditti upon Rome were at last to be rewarded. Amid the crash of the old social order in Italy, the fall of so many great centres of Renaissance riches and culture (Florence herself was in these very months making her last splendid, but unavailing, stand for liberty), Mantua emerged even stronger than ever. She was indeed to be honoured shortly by a special visit from Cæsar himself, on his way north to Germany, and to be raised by the Imperial favour from a Marquisate to a Dukedom; while Isabella was to see her wishes for the succession crowned—and at the same time her rival crushed—by the marriage, so long deferred, but

¹ *Vide* Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, "The Catholic Reaction," ch. i.

now at length to be accomplished, of her son Federigo with the heiress of the Marquis of Monferrato—a union which was to place him in the front of the princes of Italy as Duke of Mantua and Monferrato. From henceforth Monferrato becomes intimately connected with the Gonzaga story—a source of weakness and danger later, as it was now a proud accession to their dominions; but before the marriage was completed, there was to come the promised visit of the Emperor on his way north from Bologna.

“When he understood,” says the chronicler, “that at the end of February 1530, Charles was disposed to pass by Mantua before betaking himself to Germany, Federigo omitted nothing which would serve to honour the Emperor; and knew how to draw profit from the talents of Giulio Pippi and other artists and mechanics whom he could have at his Court, nor spared his private purse to display every magnificence.” Giulio Pippi, called Romano, one of Raphael’s most famous pupils at Rome, and his assistant in the frescoes in the Vatican Stanze, had the good fortune—having completed (1523) the Sala del Constantino—to enter, in 1524, the service of Federigo Gonzaga. He thus escaped the horrors of the Sack of Rome, in which his contemporary, the famous painter and architect Baldassare Peruzzi, had been caught and plundered of all he possessed. Giulio had already designed the Villa Lante, but, once at Mantua, “his art enters on a more decided phase as painter and architect. He erects and adorns churches and palaces, and, as an independent master, is now surrounded by a band of pupils, among whom Benedetto Pagni, Rinaldo Mantovano, and Primaticcio are leading figures. His great achievements at this time are the paintings of the Ducal Palace (on the ground floor the famous frescoes of the Sala di Troia) and the Palazzo del Te, which he rebuilt, and where he filled two rooms with the “Loves of Cupid and Psyche” and other subjects, and the “Overthrow of the Giants.”¹

It is at this period that the vast pile of buildings which became known as the Reggia or the Corte Regio-Ducale, though dating back (as we have seen) far earlier, begins, under

¹ *Vide* Selwyn Brinton, “Rome of the Renaissance.” Analysis: “Giulio Pippi” (*Renaissance in Italian Art*, Part ix.).

Giulio Romano's influence, to assume that character of magnificence, of more than regal splendour, which became accentuated under the later Gonzaga Dukes and still lingers in those vast halls with their superbly panelled ceilings. "In the Reggia," I have said elsewhere, "we touch the entire gamut of the Mantuan dynasty's history, from the haunting ghostly memories of those earlier Bonacolsi, the scene of whose sudden and tragic end must have been near these walls, to the intellectual splendour of Isabella, the pride of Federigo, up to those last days of their race when Carlo, Duke of Rethel, inscribed his ill-fated name upon the walls of the Paradiso." Entering by the noble staircase, we find before us in the Sala dei Duchi the portraits of the Gonzaga rulers : four Capitani, four Marquises, and eleven Dukes, commencing with Luigi Gonzaga, Captain of the People (1328), and ending with Ferdinando Carlo, the last Duke, who died in exile in 1708. In the rooms succeeding, the fine collection of sculpture from the Museum of Antiquities has now at last found a worthy home, and the noble tapestries (*vide* note) have been restored to the Appartamento degli Arazzi ;¹ while in the beautiful Sala dei Fiumi, decorated by Giorgio Anselmi, a painter of Giulio's school, with figures representing the six rivers of the Mantovano—a delightful room full of light and overlooking the beautiful hanging garden (*giardino pensile*)—we see the Gonzaga arms, the four eagles quartered in a red cross. The Sala degli Arcieri, where the guards of the Dukes kept watch—still magnificent in its design and proportions, though terribly damaged in the Sack—belongs to a later period of the Gonzaga Dukes ; but there now awaits us that Appartamento Ducale, which is really of the grand old Mantuan time, with its panelled ceilings showing the device of Marquis Francesco to which I have alluded—the bundle of golden rods aflame, with the motto "*Me probasti*,

¹ Since I have published my description of the Reggia (1907), the whole building has been—and is still being—made into a magnificent Museum of Mantuan art and story. The superb tapestries, woven in Brussels from Raphael's cartoons of scenes from the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, and acquired by Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga, were recovered from Vienna after the Great War and returned to the Reggia ; and the Grotta of Isabella, which was then a complete ruin, is being restored, as far as can be, to its original beauty.



THE RIVER-GOD PO

FROM THE PAINTING BY GIORGIO ANSEMI IN THE HALL OF THE RIVERS, REGGIA OF THE GONZAGA

Domine ”—and Isabella’s favourite device of the labyrinth, with its motto “*Forse che si, forse che no*” and the mystic number “XXVII” (*Venti sette*) with a chord of music, or, again, the motto “*Nec spe nec metu*” and her own name “Isab. Esten. Mar. Mant” (Isabella d’Este, Marchesa di Mantova), precious relics (*vide* note) of her wonderful Grotta. From the last of this suite of rooms an internal staircase descends to the curious Apartment of the Dwarfs with its tiny living-rooms and chapel—everything, including the doorways and steps themselves, being on the scale of these little creatures, whom we have seen to have been the special pets of Isabella and her Court. There are six or seven rooms here, besides their private chapel, built for them by their Gonzaga masters at Mantua; and it gives one a curious, almost uncanny sensation to walk down those little dolls’-house steps. Here, in every detail we can trace refinement, the restraint of pure taste; but what we come to next is the later splendour of the Mantuan Court—a magnificence which oppresses rather than charms. “In the vast ball room (Galleria degli Specchi) painted by Giulio and scholars—like Andreasi and the younger Costa—inheriting his tradition, this difference already comes home to us. By the Master’s own hand is the beautiful full-length figure of ‘Innocence washing her hands’—a creation worthy of Raphael himself. In the ceiling Aurora rises in her car drawn by four brown steeds; in the centre is the ‘Council of the Gods,’ and on the other side Apollo driving his four white horses balances the group of ‘Aurora.’ ”¹

By a long staircase we now approach the oldest part of the Palace, the Corte Vecchia, which was practically abandoned after the Sack of Mantua. First the vast ruined Sala di Manto; then the Sala dei Capitani, where a painting of Mantegna’s time shows Luigi Gonzaga taking, as Captain, his oath of office, while busts of the four great Captains are in the angles of the walls. Then the Sala dei Guerrieri, with the stuccos by Primaticcio and portrait busts of Lodovico Gonzaga and Barbara of Brandenburg; and next the Sala dei Trionfi, which once contained the famous “Triumph of Julius Cæsar,” painted by Mantegna for his Gonzaga patrons, which was acquired by

¹ *Vide* Selwyn Brinton, *Mantua*, ch. vii.

Charles I of England from the reigning Duke of Mantua in 1628, and is still in Hampton Court Palace. Here the walls were stripped and even the ceiling ruined ; but in the midst of this loss and desolation a magnificent treasure remains to give us an idea of what were once the splendours of the Mantuan Ducal Palace. This good fortune seems to be entirely owing to the fact that at the time of the sack of Mantua, or very shortly after, the entrance from the series of chambers we have just visited to the Sala di Troja was walled off from the soldiers on both sides, and the pictures thus preserved from wanton injury during that disastrous Austrian occupation.

“ These paintings are indeed a series of masterpieces by Giulio Romano and his school. . . . Most of all in the scene of ‘ Andromache’s Dream,’ prophetic of coming woes, and that of ‘ Helen’s Departure,’ which is a very living and dramatic rendering ; for the subject of these frescoes in the Sala di Troja is entirely drawn from that old story of the Trojan war. We see here not only ‘ Andromache’s Dream ’ and the ‘ Rape of Helen,’ but the ‘ Judgment of Paris ’—what artist of Giulio’s period could resist such a legitimate opportunity of depicting the nude ?—the ‘ Trojan Horse,’ ‘ Ajax killed by the bolt of Pallas,’ ‘ Thetis giving his arms to Achilles,’ and ‘ Laocoön with the serpents entwined about him.’ ” ¹

But when we leave this happily preserved Sala di Troja we find again evidence of the destroyer’s hand in the Sala dei Marmi, where the marbles which once covered its walls were carried off in the Sack, though the surviving “ stucchi ” and the cupids in the roundels are often of beauty. The old writer Cadioli cannot here refrain from lamentation. “ How it goes to my heart when I consider that of various other chambers, all adorned with paintings by Giulio, none remains on which the eye can rest without deploring their irreparable ruin. . . . Only can ye still observe the most beautiful ceilings, divided charmingly with the finest carvings, and the gilded ‘ stucchi.’ ” ²

Yet the arabesques remain, which Giulio had painted on

¹ *Vide* Selwyn Brinton, *Mantua*, ch. vii.

² See *Descrizione della Pitture, Sculture ed Architettura nella Città di Mantova*. Da Giovanni Cadioli. MDCCLXIII. This rare and most useful little volume I had the fortune to find some twenty years ago in Mantua.



THE HORSE OF DUKE FEDERIGO

FROM THE DESIGN OF GIULIO ROMANO IN THE HALL OF THE HORSES AT THE PALACE OF THE TE MANTUA

the roof of the Loggia looking out over the Lago Inferiore and that Ponte S. Giorgio which still divides the two parts of the lower Lake ; and which was originally (as this writer tells us) built of brick in 1404, and covered in like the Ponte dei Mulini, and was to be later, in the fall of Mantua, the main point of attack through which the Imperialists entered. From the Loggia we can see the stables, the "Cavallerizza" which Giulio designed in noble proportions ; and from the terrace near it could be watched at the same time both the regattas on the lake and the tournaments which were held later for the Ducal amusement in the central square below.

Even more definitely and directly connected with the period of Federigo's rule is that famous palace of pleasure which is known as the Palazzo del Te. "Here, between the Pusterla and Cerese gates, the Marquis Francesco Gonzaga, Isabella's soldier husband, had kept his stud of racing horses, which were famous throughout Europe ; and here, at the close of 1524, his son Federigo Gonzaga commissioned the artist and architect Giulio Pippi, then but lately summoned by him to Mantua, to build him the palace of lavish splendour that his heart desired. The work was promptly put in hand, and advanced apace ; for we find already in the early months of 1526 the painters, the "stuccatori" (stucco-workers), and gilders are busy on the internal decorations, which the Marquis is pressing them to finish—so that the greater part of the Palace must then have been already standing. The principal building here, with the large court in the centre, forms a square, and the order of architecture throughout is Doric, but exhibiting all the variety of which that style is capable. Even if a little monotonous, the whole impression is none the less very noble and harmonious in its proportions." ¹

Those who only know Giulio as a masterful but somewhat florid painter must visit Mantua to appreciate his great powers as an architect ; and among the finest—as it is among the first—of his creations there is this beautiful Palace of the Te, in whose internal decoration he had to aid him a group of brilliant artists, such as Rinaldo Mantovano, Benedetto Pagni da Pescia, Gianfrancesco Penni (like himself from Rome, and one

¹ *Vide* Selwyn Brinton, *Mantua*, ch. viii.

of Raphael's scholars), Fermo da Caravaggio, and, in the "stucchi" adornment especially, the incomparable Primaticcio. Let us now enter the Palace and study the paintings in detail. As we enter the first room of the present (it would be the eighth of the old) entrance we see before us a beautiful ceiling fresco by Giulio himself, or painted under his close direction. It shows us Phœbus descending, and Luna arising with her chariot and horses, both subjects seen foreshortened—a favourite device of Giulio and his followers, which we shall notice frequently in the succeeding rooms. Perhaps they had taken the idea from Mantegna's brilliantly audacious fresco of Women and Loves, looking down from a circular balcony, in the Sala degli Sposi; but where Andrea, with all his boldness of technique, yet invested his rendering with a dignity and purity of the highest art, these later artists of the Te seem to sometimes use the same *motif* as a disguise for licence—not indeed in this room nor in the Sala dei Cavelli next, where the six beautiful portraits (painted, it is said, from Giulio's design) of Duke Federigo's favourite horses, by Rinaldo Mantovano and Benedetto Pagni, mark a very high level in animal painting. Barbs are these—as those of us who have ridden in Algiers can easily recognize—but with the pure Arab strain in their blood; and without doubt descendants of Marquis Francesco's famous breed, the same who won the Corso dei Barberi in Rome, while the people shouted "Mantova! Turco! Turco!"—and even Pope Julius smiled approval. Look at that white steed with his coquettish ribbon of blue, his finely bred, intelligent head and well-shaped shoulder.

But it is in the Sala de Psyche that we have preserved to us a masterpiece of the genius of Giulio and his contemporaries. Strada in his valuable account of the Palace calls this a "large, square-shaped room where is the legend of Psyche; all the roof is covered with figures painted in perspective in oil (*in scurcio a olio*); the designs of these Giulio Romano made with his own hands."¹ Strada goes on to tell us that he was

¹ Strada, an archæologist of high repute, was summoned to Vienna, in 1550, as "Cesareo Antiquario," to give a complete account of Italy, in which Mantua would figure, with her Castello, her churches—S. Barbara, S. Andrea, S. Sebastian, and S. Pietro—and the Gonzaga Palaces of Marmirolo and the



THE STORY OF CUPID AND PSYCHE

FROM THE CEILING OF GIULIO ROMANO IN THE SALA DI PSICHE AT THE PALACE OF THE TE, MANTUA

assisted in this room by Penni, and Vasari states that Benedetto Pagni worked here ; while we know from other sources that—besides Giulio, Penni, and Pagni—Rinaldo Mantovano and Lorenzo Costa were painting in this room.

Here then we find a work produced under Giulio's design and inspiration, with the best available talent of the Mantuan school to help him ; and the result, with all its defects, with all the difficulties under which it was produced, is something magnificent. What those difficulties were we may judge from a surviving letter of Marquis Federigo to Giulio, in which he says, " Since we hear that no painter is at work in our rooms in the Palazzo del Te we begin to think they will not be finished either by August, as you had promised, nor yet by September nor October," and threatens to find other painters. Poor Giulio's reply (dated Mantua, August 31, 1528) shows the troubles of a hard-pressed Court architect : " The greatest affliction I can receive is when your Excellency is annoyed, the greatest glory I can know when I can feel myself in your favour ; and if it be your Grace's pleasure you may lock me up in that big room until it is finished, but even so I can do nothing against the will of God. Seeing that we have been unable to push forward the work through the fact that I myself and all my assistants, down to the very boy who mixed the colours, have been all sick ; and to keep up their credit I have myself paid the expenses of doctors, medicine, and drugs so that they might yet be willing to keep at work—and myself but two days away, not like those who for a fever keep their room for a month."

Now let us turn to the paintings themselves, in which the legend of Psyche claims a first place. Giulio knew already the pictorial capacities of this charming legend, from his master Raphael's treatment of it in the Farnesina frescoes ; and here it has inspired him with two of the most beautiful paintings of the whole series—that of Psyche who, lamp in hand, bends over the sleeping form of Love, and the beautiful scene of the

Te. In this work he applied to Duke Guglielmo for assistance, and had from him the original design of the Palace from Giulio's own hand. His description is therefore of great value and help to our research, and was published (1904) by the Municipality of Mantua.

“Marriage of Cupid and Psyche.” The figures in most cases are entirely nude, while in the first-named picture the light falls fully from the lamp in the girl’s left hand, and her figure is seen in abrupt perspective from below. Here the artist seeks to show his technical cleverness ; but in the “Marriage of Psyche” he rises to a high point of lyrical beauty. The lovers, united after so many trials and sufferings, lie together upon a couch, nude, save that Psyche wears a band or zone about her waist ; her face and form is of radiant loveliness, and they both turn faces filled with joy to the winged Child Love who is placing two crowns upon their brows, while a merry rout of Satyrs completes the picture.

Then, leaving his memories of the Farnesina, Giulio turns to other scenes of Grecian legend. Here young Dionysus, a figure of wonderful beauty, has come to us from farthest India, with tigers and lions at his feet and behind him old Silenus with his goat-legged Fauns, while the head of a great Bactrian camel overlooks the riotous throng. Here again is Apollo circled by the Muses, Mars surprising Venus with Adonis or sharing the bath with the same goddess, Jupiter and Olympia, Pasiphae with the Dædalean cow—a whole selection from the *Metamorphoses*. But if poor Psyche was upbraided by Venus in the Farnesina, here she is being dragged about by the hair of her head ; if the loves of Leda with Jove were a recognized subject for Renaissance art, even this never equalled the scene depicted here, where Jupiter, half-man, half-dragon, approaches the unresisting Olympia ; nor can the constant choice of nude figures seen in abrupt perspective from below (as where Psyche stoops over sleeping Love, or in the Cupids who fly up above the scene of her punishment) have been entirely unintentional. The fault may not have lain entirely with the artists, for they probably had a pretty clear idea what were their Prince’s wishes in the matter. “The Gonzaghi,” says D’Arco, “after their elevation to the Ducal dignity, abandoned themselves to splendour and luxury ; and, corrupted by the flattery of courtiers and the ease of Court life, indulged freely in vices of which the record lives in their history.”

We shall find some part of that record in the later pages



THE MARRIAGE OF CUPID AND PSYCHE AND THE TRIUMPH OF BACCHUS



THE BATH OF VENUS AND MARS

FROM THE PAINTINGS BY GIULIO ROMANO IN THE SALA DI PSYCHE AT THE PALACE OF THE TE, MANTUA

of this work, and see there how directly it led up to the ruin and extinction of their great House. The frescoes of this Sala de Psyche are indeed clear evidence of the splendid luxury and of the licence of their later Court. The unbridled freedom of the rendering is only atoned for by the opulent, unfettered, and often high imaginative beauty of the result—most of all in those paintings in which Giulio's own hand can be traced. This is probably the case in the gigantic "Polyphemus," and I am inclined to believe also in the "Marriage of Psyche" and the beautiful "Triumph of Bacchus"; the "Pasiphae" has been attributed to Pagni da Pescia, and the "Mars Surprising Venus," the "Snake Jupiter and Olympia" and the lunettes of Psyche's story, to Rinaldo Mantovano. To complete our idea of this famous Sala di Psyche, let us note here that its lower walls were covered with tapestry hangings and its doors with bronze—all carried off amid the horrors of the Sack—but the inscription of Marquis Federigo remains to tell how all this was made for his rest after labour and quiet delight. "*Federicus Gonzaga Mar . . . Ocio post labores ad repar. Virt. quiete construi mandavit.*"

I have given special attention to this Sala di Psyche, as it is far the most beautiful and significant, and shall treat more briefly the succeeding rooms, which are, however, full of artistic interest. To the next room Giulio's painting of the "Fall of Phaethon" has given its name; and here Primaticcio has been at work on the "stucchi" and decoration, while the three antique busts of Roman ladies are of singular beauty.¹ Then the great Loggia—"of marvellous beauty," writes old Strada, "where are paintings and works in stucco from the history of King David . . . and for the paintings of the ceiling Giulio made the designs"; the documents indeed show to us that Benedetto da Pescia and Rinaldo Mantovano were here at work upon Giulio's designs. There follows the Sala degli Stucchi, with a magnificent processional relief of Roman soldiers, such as Mantegna had imagined in his "Triumph of Cæsar," and to which later the—to me less convincing—title

¹ These busts are mentioned by Strada, and are portraits of Aricidia (beneath the Centaurs), Julia (beneath the Tritons), and Julia Paola (beneath the Amazons).

of the "Triumphal Entry of Emperor Sigismund" into Mantua (1433) was given.¹ These reliefs are the work of the incomparable Primaticcio and his Mantuan assistants; and the eagle, twin-headed and crowned, which appears on the shield of the horseman riding next after the Imperator, was probably a compliment to the artist's patron or his Imperial visitor.

In March of 1530, Marquis Federigo was to receive in Mantua the Emperor Charles V; and it is certain that these rooms we have just traversed—namely, those of the Cavalli, of Psyche, of the Winds, of Phaethon, as well as this noble Loggia and the Sala of Cæsar following—were hurried forward so as to be ready for the splendid reception on that occasion, when Federigo obtained the coveted title of Duke. For the promised visit of the Emperor himself was now approaching, and the whole city was on tiptoe of expectation. In the year preceding (1529) Cardinal Pirro Gonzaga² had died at Sabbioneta; and in the same year the Gonzaga had lost a faithful friend and devoted servant in Count Baldassarre Castiglione, whose father had died fighting with Marquis Francesco in the battle of the Taro, and his mother been a Gonzaga. Brought up in the fine tradition of Vittorino and Guarino, of scholarship combined with physical culture, Baldassarre grew up to be a courtier, soldier, a finished gentleman, and great diplomatist. As such he was appreciated by Julius II at Rome, and thence went to enter the service of Guidobaldo, Duke of Urbino, of whose Court he has left us a memorable record in his *Cortegiano*.³

¹ Vasari calls these reliefs "a procession of Roman soldiers, imitating that of the Column of Trajan," and gives them to Primaticcio and his helpers; it was not till a century later that the name of Sigismund appeared for this subject.

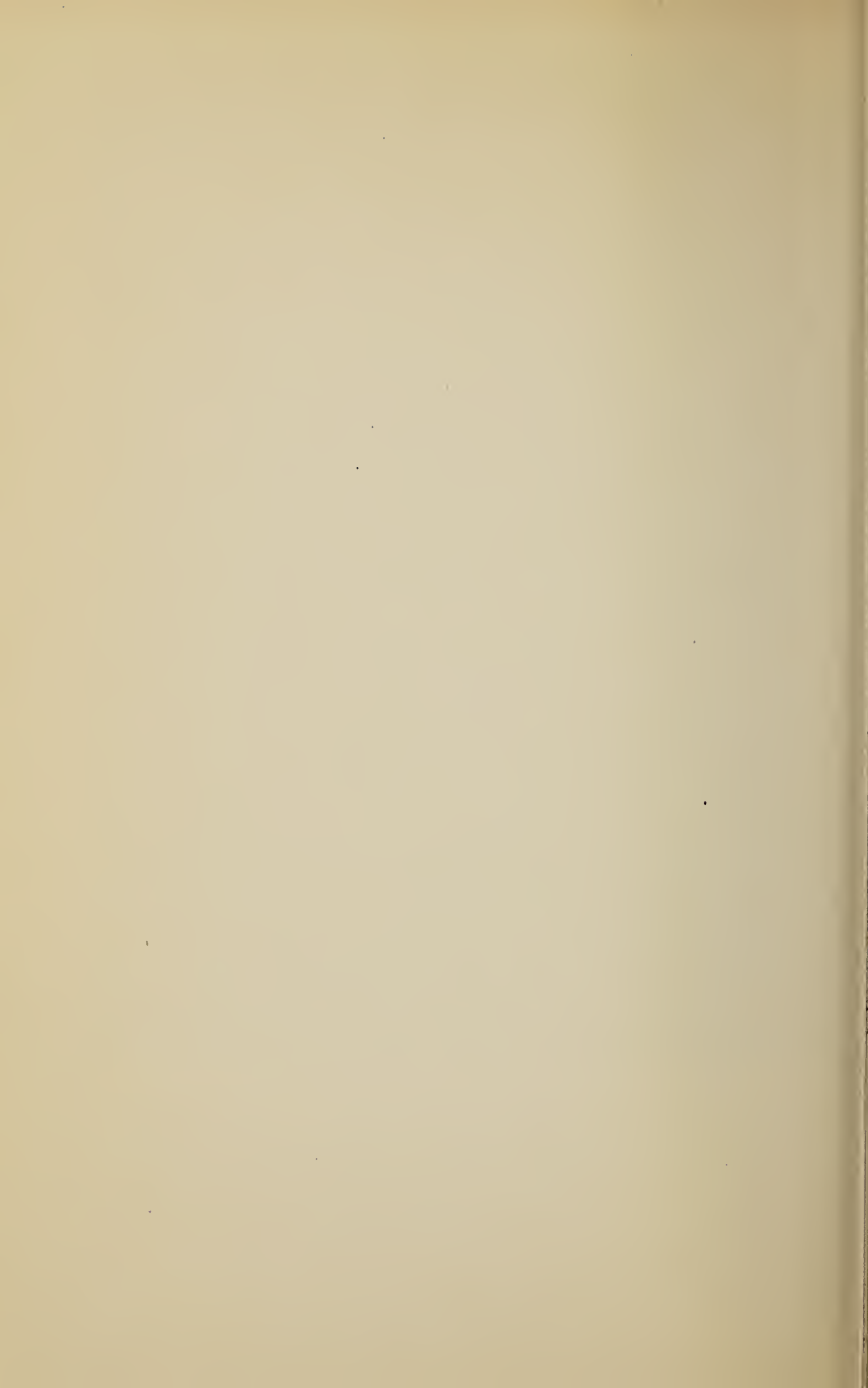
² It had been Luigi Gonzaga, called Rodomonte—son of Lodovico, Lord of Gazzuolo, and a soldier of fortune like Ferrante Gonzaga—who had assisted the escape of Clement VII, disguised as a merchant, from the Castel S. Angelo to Orvieto, and had accompanied him on that dangerous journey. In gratitude the Pope made his brother Pirro a Cardinal, so that Casa Gonzaga had two Cardinals at this time.

³ I have before me an old edition of *Il Cortegiano*, published by Filippo Giunta at Florence, in October 1528, the year preceding the writer's death, which I had the fortune to secure at Mantua. In this work we find a picture of the perfect courtier, and of the brilliant Court of Urbino under the Montefeltri. It was Castiglione who had brought from Rome to Mantua both Giulio Romano and Benedetto Pagni.



THE TRIUMPH OF BACCHUS (DETAIL)

FROM THE PAINTING BY GIULIO ROMANO IN THE SALA DI PSYCHE AT THE PALACE OF THE TE, MANTUA



He was sent by Guidobaldo to England, in 1506, to receive as his proxy from Henry VII the investiture of the Garter ; but after his Duke's death, Baldassarre returned (1516) to the service of the Marquis of Mantua, and married a girl of noble Mantuan family, Ippolita de' Torelli. Sent as envoy by the Marquis to Rome, he enjoyed the friendship of Raphael, and later went to Spain in the service of Clement VII ; but all his influence at that Court failed to avert the disaster of the Sack of Rome ; and it is possible that this preyed on his mind, for he died at Toledo (1529) only two years later. His body was brought back to Mantua, and given honourable burial in the Church of S. Maria delle Grazie. It was Giulio Romano himself who was entrusted there with his marble monument ; and that finished Latinist, Cardinal Bembo, his personal friend, who added the inscription.

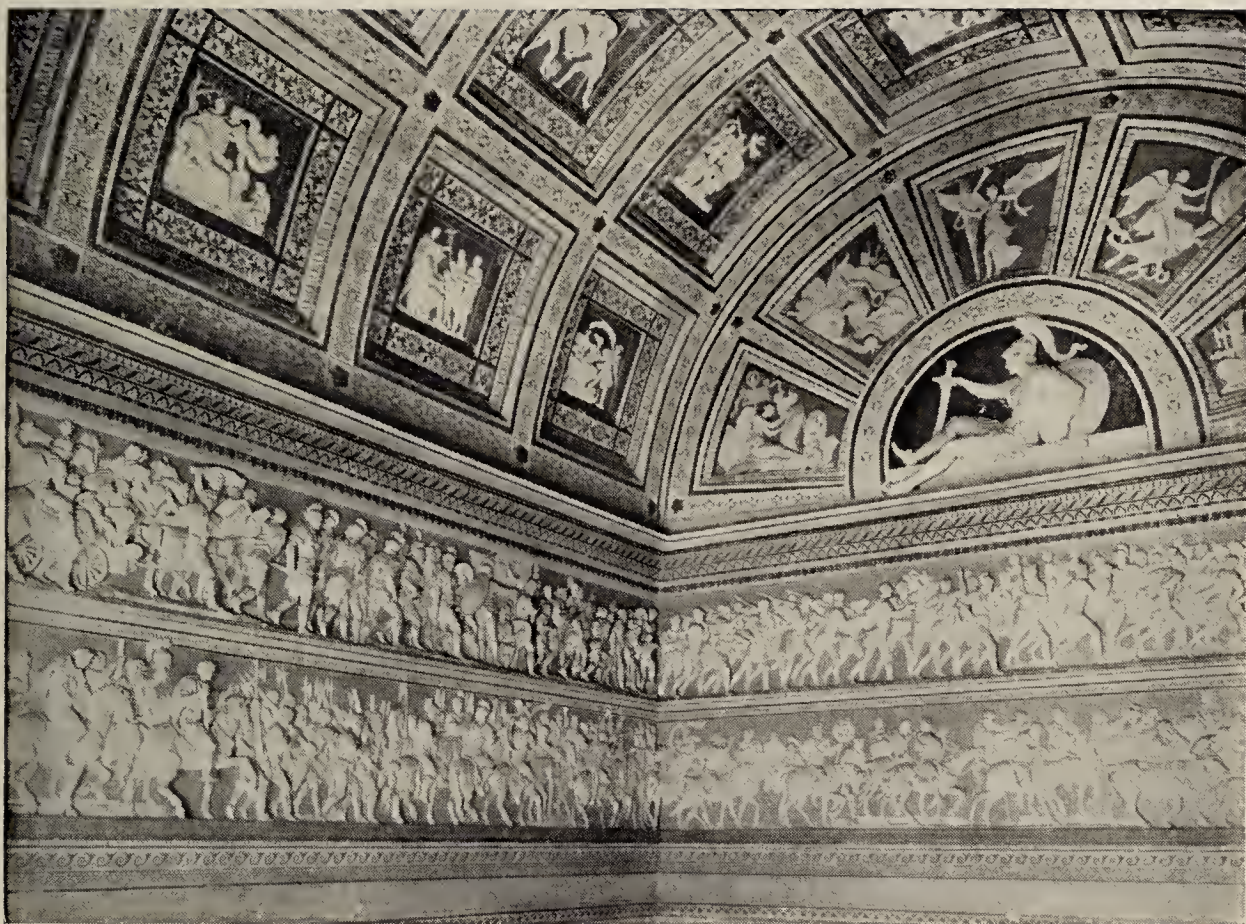
On March 24, 1530, the Emperor Charles arrived with his escort of cavalry at Castello de' Gonzaga, and at dawn of the next day, the Feast of the Annunciation, he continued his journey to Mantua. The Marquis Federigo had ridden out to meet his illustrious guest at the Porta Pradella, where the Emperor received the clergy come to meet him in procession, refused the city keys there offered to him, and put on the Imperial ornaments. He was now clad in gold and silver brocade, wearing the cap and sword of Empire ; and thus, beneath a rich baldacchino of white satin, escorted by fifty youths of knightly rank clad in white, " preceded by his Captains and troops and the aforesaid clergy, amid the sounds of musical instruments, the thunder of artillery, and the acclamations of an immense crowd, he entered by the said gate between the two Cardinals, Cibò and de' Medici : and followed by the Cardinal Ercole, the Marquis, the Duke of Ferrara, Luigi called Rodomonte, and other princes and lords of the illustrious House of Gonzaga, and innumerable knights come to honour their Marquis," he passed beneath triumphal arches and flower-covered streets to the Cathedral of S. Pietro. Here the Emperor dismounted, entering that Temple to render thanks to God ; then retired into the Castello, which was becomingly arranged to serve as a Royal Palace, while the other princes and distinguished persons were distributed for lodging

among the best houses of the city, so that the Marquis gave up his own palace, and stayed in that of the Te without Porta Pusterla.

Our chronicler becomes ecstatic and almost bewildered in describing the festivities which followed—the “giostre,” theatrical displays, hunting parties, and the delights (*delizie*) of the Palace of Marmirolo. To entertain his guest, the Marquis had closed the “sostegno del Mincio,” so as to enlarge the lakes ; and conducted the Emperor on the water over the ground which he had traversed on horseback two days earlier. The great day came at last, on the 8th of April, when Marquis Federigo, crowned and wearing the purple, stood before the great doors of the Cathedral, amid the sound of trumpets and the shouts of the people there assembled, to be proclaimed by his guest—in virtue of his Imperial authority and under his great seal—as the first Duke of Mantua, and the lands of Viadana raised to a Marquisate for the Duke Gonzaga’s eldest son.¹ This was the central moment in the proud story of Casa Gonzaga, and for Isabella herself was, as has been well said, “the crowning triumph of her life, the reward of her labours and passionate devotion to her family and country.” The days of Holy Week preceding Easter were spent by the Emperor within a convent’s walls in devotional exercises ; and on the Tuesday following that festival, April 19, he left Mantua for Germany, accompanied by the new Duke as far as the borders of Trento, where Federigo expressed to Charles V his grateful thanks, and was assured by him of his protection.

Owing to the haste with which the rooms in the Palace of the Te had been completed, so as to be ready for the Emperor’s visit, some of the work had to be done over again ; and in the records of 1534 we find payments made to Maestro Fermo di Caravazo (Caravaggio), painter, for work in that palace, “in painting three ceilings—the which paintings had been made in haste for the visit of the Emperor to Mantua and then destroyed by order of His Highness.” When we have passed the Sala di Cesare we come to the famous Sala of the Giants—

¹ Viadana had six thousand persons within her walls and twenty thousand in the territory ; governed by her own municipal laws, she had been one of the fiefs left to Casa Gonzaga in 1444.



PROCESSION OF ROMAN SOLDIERS



FEMALE FIGURES

FROM THE STUCCO RELIEFS BY PRIMATICCIO IN THE PALACE OF THE TE, MANTUA



“ a great room,” writes Strada, “ in the midst of whose ceiling is painted in perspective the Palace of Jove, and beneath appear that god and Juno, who have summoned to their council all the gods, showing to them the great pride of the Giants broken. A marvellous sight and terrible to behold! All this was painted by the hand of Rinaldo . . . and the original drawings by Giulio are in my own hands.” The drawings here alluded to seem to have disappeared, but the painting remains to fully justify old Strada’s statement. “ A marvellous sight, and terrible ” they are indeed! Above, in heaven, the gods of Olympus still hold victorious sway; but beneath, on earth, hurled headlong, crushed beneath the tottering columns, lies a tangled mass of prostrate forms—the earth-children who had tried to scale high Olympus, and are struck down, still raving in impotent fury, by the bolt of the Omnipotent. The subject has been painted by another of Raphael’s pupils, Pierino del Vaga, in the Palazzo Doria at Genoa, and might seem to us as an allegory—almost within these walls a pictured warning—of the hopes, high as heaven itself, the splendid achievement, the hidden sins of lust and blood, the terrible and irremediable fall of this wonderful Italy of the Renaissance. As I watched these fallen Titans, alone in the silent room where the shades of twilight were entering, their terrible faces seemed to become instinct again with life, their lips to move as if convulsed with blasphemy; and the shadowy forms of that Court of luxury and pride and hidden crime to become blended with them in my fancy, amid these scenes of their past life. The obsession of their presence became intolerable; and it was a relief to go forth into the garden that surrounds the Palace.

“ There lacked at this time,” says our chronicler, “ to complete the contentment of Mantua the marriage of her Duke, for which his mother, Marchesa Isabella, took special thought.” During the Emperor’s visit, the Infanta Julia of Aragon had been suggested as his bride, and the betrothal seems, in fact, to have taken place; but a far better match in every way, both in age (for Julia was well over thirty) and political advantage, now offered itself in the Princess of Monferrato, to whose eldest sister Federigo had once been affianced. The latter had now

died, and the death at this time of her brother, the young Marquis of Monferrato, from a fall when out hunting, left Margherita Paleologa as sole heiress of the rich principality of Monferrato. She was now twenty years of age, and, on the death of her sister, Duke Federigo lost no time in pressing his suit, which evidently had his mother's entire approval. He had his contract with the Infanta Julia annulled by the Pope in March of 1531, secured—after some trouble—the Emperor's consent, and persuaded the Marchesa di Monferrato to let the wedding take place in October of 1531. At the end of September he left Mantua with a brilliant suite, travelling first to Pavia, and on his way to Monferrato was joined by his cousin, the Duke of Milan, Francesco Maria Sforza, and—as representing the Emperor—the terrible Spanish Governor of Milan, Antonio de Leyva. In the Castello of Casale in Monferrato, a suite of apartments had been prepared for him hung with gold brocade, velvet, and satin; and the wedding took place on the evening of his arrival in the Marchesa's bedroom. Meanwhile, Isabella was once more administering the State in her son's absence, and Giulio Romano and his assistants were busy making ready the apartment in the Castello, to the right of S. Giorgio drawbridge, known as the Palazzina, which was intended for the new Duchess. Isabella was deeply interested in these arrangements, for we hear “that yesterday Madama Illustrissima came to the Castello, and wished to see everything,” and she remained for more than an hour enjoying the view.¹ Giulio had suggested that a flight of steps should be made from the lake, with a portico and triumphal arch, such as used in the Emperor's visit, for the bride's reception; but the weather settled this part of the programme—the Po, Mincio, and Oglio again broke their banks, and the entry of the Duke and his young Duchess, received by Isabella, Cardinal Ercole, and the nobles of Mantua, did not take place until mid-November.²

¹ *Vide* Cartwright, *op. cit.* ch. xl.

² “In the coming of the Emperor Charles to Mantua,” says Vasari, “by orders of the Duke, Giulio made many most beautiful ornaments of arches, settings (*prospettivi*) for plays, and many other things; in which inventions Giulio had no equal, nor in the designing of fantastic dresses for masquerades, festivals, and tournaments.” *Vide* Vasari, *Le Vite de' più Eccellenti Pittori*, etc.

In the year following (1532) the Emperor paid another visit to Italy, escorted by Don Ferrante Gonzaga, with two thousand horse, and many of his Captains.¹ He entered Mantua by the Bridge of S. Giorgio on November 7, and was conducted in great state to his apartment in the Castello; later he went to the Convent of S. Agnese (where he had previously spent Holy Week), and made his prayers before the Most Precious Blood within the Basilica of S. Andrea. To this time may be due the famous portrait of Isabella d'Este by Titian—who had become the Emperor's favourite painter—which is now in the Imperial Gallery of Vienna; and it was during this visit that the poet Ariosto was invited to Mantua to meet the Emperor, to whom he presented his "*Orlando*," and by Imperial diploma was crowned as poet-laureate.

Were it permitted for a moment to the writer to regard this story of Casa Gonzaga from the side of its humorous possibilities, it might be of interest to imagine the effect produced upon the leading members of this illustrious family at receiving, by what may have corresponded to their morning mail, a missive with a very heavy seal, to inform them that their late Imperial guest had enjoyed himself so much that he proposed very shortly to pay them another visit; and it is possible that, when this visit materialized, they were not altogether sorry to find him retire for his devotions to his favourite convent, or even to see the last of such an overpowering and expensive visitor. We have noticed that Charles V had consented with some difficulty to the Monferrato marriage, which had cancelled his plans for the Infanta Julia, and which also threatened to sandwich his Duchy of Milan between the lands of Mantua and Monferrato; and now, before leaving Italy, he hit upon a scheme which, had it succeeded, would have completely countered the interest in the latter territory of Duke Federigo and Casa Gonzaga. This was nothing less than a marriage, actually arranged by the Emperor at this time, between Donna Julia of Aragon,

¹ Don Ferrante Gonzaga, who had been Isabella's saviour at Rome, had commanded the Imperialist troops in the siege of Florence, and by his influence and authority saved that city from the horrors of a sack. He married, soon after, a rich heiress, Isabella of Capua, and bought the principality of Guastalla from the Torelli family.

Duke Federigo's rejected bride, and his father-in-law, the old Marquis of Monferrato. This marriage was celebrated at Ferrara, and on April 21, 1533, the bride made her entry into Casale. But the poor old bridegroom was in such failing health that he could not leave his room, and died eight days later. Donna Julia—whose matrimonial experiments had not been crowned with success—seems to have returned once more to her family.¹ It would seem as if the influence of Isabella Boschetti² over Duke Federigo had not entirely ceased, even after his marriage, and came to affect the position of the young Duchess and cause trouble with her family; but in March of 1533, Duchess Margherita gave birth to a son and heir, who was called Francesco after his grandfather, and held at the font by Marchesa Isabella.

Meanwhile, the embellishment of Mantua under Giulio's direction continued—of which Vasari tells us that “in that whole city he designed at different times so many chapels, houses, gardens, façades, and so delighted himself in its beautifying and adornment, that, while before it was covered with mud (*sotto-posta al fango*), and at certain times full of dirty water and almost uninhabitable, it is to-day by his industry and efforts clean, wholesome, and altogether charming and pleasing.”³ Scarcely had his magnificent work at the Te been completed than were put in hand the paintings in the Sala di Troja which I have mentioned, the Borgo di Porto was encircled with walls, and “that ancient Church of S. Benedetto of Mantua, near the Po, a very large and rich foundation of the Black monks”—which I have mentioned in an earlier chapter under its name of S. Benedetto in Polirone—“was rebuilt and decorated. In like manner,” adds Vasari, “at Marmirolo, five miles distant from Mantua, was constructed,

¹ This story is given by Cartwright, *op. cit.* ch. xli.

² Vasari tells us that Giulio made by his own hand for Duke Federigo a painting of Our Lady with Jesus and the little St. John, “which picture was given by the Duke to Signora Isabella Buschetta (Boschetti), of whom Giulio then painted the likeness, and a very beautiful one, in a little picture of the Nativity of Christ which is to-day in the hands of Lord Vespasiano Gonzaga.” This last painting is lost, but the former one is in the Dresden Gallery, and another altarpiece of the Holy Family with St. John and St. Longinus, painted by Giulio for the Boschetti's chapel in S. Andrea, is now in the Musée du Louvre.

³ *Vide* Vasari, *op. cit.*, “Giulio Romano.”

by the order and design of Giulio, a most commodious building, adorned with paintings no less fine than those of the Castello and Palazzo del Te"—all of which have since perished amid the horrors of the Sack of Mantua in 1630.

On the night of February 13, 1539, the great Princess Isabella d'Este da Gonzaga died in the Corte Vecchia at Mantua. With her passed away a great figure from Casa Gonzaga. "The piety, prudence, and love towards her subjects of this lady," writes the chronicler, "caused the most profound grief at her loss to the Mantuans, who regarded her as their benefactress and support, and as a marvel of their own age ; and soon the citizens felt the lack of such a heroine, seeing that the Duke, who measured all by his own good heart, easily let himself be surrounded by Ministers who oppressed the country with abuses and injustice." ¹ By her own wish the Marchesa was buried in the Church of S. Francesco—sometimes called S. Paola, from the neighbouring convent—where Duke Federigo ordered for her a noble tomb in the sepulchral chapel of the Gonzaga princes. But before this was completed he had himself fallen ill, and, withdrawing by his doctor's advice to his delightful palace of Marmirolo, died there on June 28, 1540 ; leaving by his will his first-born son Francesco to succeed him in the Dukedom, under the guardianship of his mother, the Duchess Margherita, and his uncle, Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga ; and to his other children—Guglielmo, Lodovico, and Isabella—he left each 8000 ducats yearly. Duke Federigo was buried by his own last wishes at his mother's side in S. Francesco ; but when, in 1797, after a terrible siege the French took Mantua, the church, with hundreds of monuments of the Gonzaga princes, was pillaged and its tombs broken to fragments. Of the last resting-place of the great Isabella d'Este and her son Federigo not a trace now remains.

Like his ancestors, Duke Federigo had been a brave soldier ; and, later in life, a great builder and patron of the arts. Two things only are blamed in him by the Mantuan chronicler—one being his notorious relations with Isabella Boschetti, by whom he had two sons ; the other that, in attending himself

¹ *Vide Volta, op. cit.*

personally to the direction of his great buildings, he had left to his two favourites the administration of justice, which they abused. On July 5, 1540, with the usual solemn forms, his son Francesco, then seven years of age, was proclaimed Duke in the Piazza S. Pietro ; but the Regency remained in the safe hands of that great statesman and great churchman, Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga, with Don Ferrante Gonzaga and the widowed Duchess Margherita as guardians with him of the young Prince.

Giulio Romano had felt bitterly the loss of his beloved patron, Duke Federigo, and, Vasari tells us, would have left Mantua “ had not the Cardinal, brother of the Duke, to whom remained the government of the State, detained him in the city, more especially to have the counsel and aid of Giulio in restoring and almost remaking the Duomo of that city.” His work there remains to us, and—though we do not know what we may have lost in that historic older Gothic cathedral of S. Pietro, nor can find here the majesty and severity of Alberti’s S. Andrea—Giulio has bequeathed us in the Duomo a beautiful Renaissance interior. It was at this time that Giorgio Vasari, on his way to Venice, came to visit him in Mantua ; and, now that Antonio Sangallo had recently died in Rome, the deputies of the Fabbrica of S. Pietro, looking for an architect, turned their thoughts to Giulio, and made their offer to him through certain of his friends—but in vain. “ For, though he would willingly have gone, two things held him back—the Cardinal, who would by no means let him depart ; and his wife, with her friends and relations, who discouraged him in every way.” He had been made by the Cardinal at this time Prefect of the waters and buildings of Mantua, with a yearly stipend from the Gonzaga of 1000 ducats ; and had set to work draining the marshes, enlarging the streets and making conduits, so that the whole appearance of Mantua was changed.

Yet the temptation had been a great one—to take the place at Rome over St. Peter’s, which had been once held by his own beloved Master, Raphael, and later by the immortal Michelangelo ; and while he was perhaps hesitating, doubtful, yet full of regrets at the golden offer lost, “ between these

displeasures and his ill health he died within a few days at Mantua," upon the 1st of November 1546. A great Master of his time—that time the full of the Renaissance—both in painting and architecture. "Bold, secure, capricious, varied, abundant and universal; not to say that he was most sweet in social life, jovial, affable, gracious and full of excellent manners; which qualities were the reason that he was loved by Raphael in such manner that had he been his own son that Master could not have loved him more."¹ With him we leave the great age of the Renaissance—with its enthusiasm for knowledge, its passion for the antique beauty, its fulness of almost sensuous splendour: we come now to another age, very different in spirit and outlook, which awaits us in these remaining pages of Mantuan story.

¹ *Vide* Vasari, *op. cit.*, "Giulio Romano."

CHAPTER X

THE GONZAGA DUKES OF MANTUA AND MONFERRATO

WE have now reached a point in our story when the whole aspect of Italian national life had become changed profoundly—and for the worse. By the settlement of Bologna, Italy had become virtually subject to Spain and the Papacy, two reactionary powers which—it has been said—quenched for three centuries the light of her genius. “The history of this period (1530–1600) in Italy is a prolonged and inexpressibly heartrending tragedy. It is the tragic history of the eldest and most beautiful, the noblest and most venerable, the freest and most gifted of Europe’s daughters, delivered over to the devilry that issued from the most incompetent and arrogantly stupid of the European sisterhood, and to the cruelty, inspired by panic, of an impious theocracy.”¹

We are approaching in Italy an epoch of Viceroyal rule, with an insolent foreign soldiery quartered on the people, and the pressure of merciless taxation draining the economic sources of their life. We are coming to the period of the Inquisition and of Jesuitry; of petty principedoms and empty forms of etiquette and court intrigue; of thought and literature stifled among the puerilities of the Academies, of whole regions given over to banditti and malaria, and a seacoast ravaged by pirates.

Even the dress now worn—the black or dark colours introduced by Spain in place of the brilliant costumes of the

¹ *Vide* Symonds, *Catholic Reaction*, ch. i. In using these words of Spain and the Papacy at this critical point—the former abandoned to the fiend of religious fanaticism, the latter under the influence of selfish terror—the writer does not fail to do justice to the better elements of both.

Renaissance—seems typical of a nation in mourning for its subjection to foreign tyrants and ecclesiastical hypocrisy.

“Black robes” (wrote Campanella) “befit our age; once they were white;

Next many hued; now dark as Afric’s Moor . . .

For very shame we shun all colours bright,

Who mourn our end, the tyrants we endure . . .

Our dismal heroes, our souls sunk in night.”

The people may have suffered less directly from wars of foreign invasion, for in the *Paix des Dames* (confirmed later in 1559) France had relinquished her claims upon Italy; but they were left at the mercy of Spanish Viceroy, and taxed up to the very necessities of life, corn, salt, flour and bread being used as monopolies. On the death of Francesco Maria, the last of the Sforza, Milan had been annexed to the Crown of Spain; the Republics of Florence and Siena had been extinguished; Venice yet survived, but the rest of Italy was controlled by Spain or the Papacy.

Yet Mantua, under the wise guidance of Cardinal Ercole, had remained untouched; had even increased in power with the accession of Monferrato to her Dukedom; and enjoyed, under the direct Imperial favour, the time-honoured rule of her Gonzaga princes. The young Duke Francesco had been proclaimed with solemn form in the Piazza S. Pietro; but the Regency remained in the hands of his mother, the Duchess Margherita, of Cardinal Ercole and his uncle Don Ferrante; and the city and State were quiet and at peace. Then suddenly occurred one of those tragic instances in its story, which almost seem as if over this House of Gonzaga—so successful, so well established even in this new Italy of Spanish domination, where many other great States had perished for ever—there hung some secret destiny, some terrible and unescapable doom.

There had been great rejoicings in the city for the visit of Prince Philip, son of the Emperor Charles V, who on his way from Spain to Germany had passed through Milan and then Mantua, where—escorted by Duke Ercole of Ferrara, by the young Gonzaga Duke and his uncle Don Ferrante, with the Cardinal Ercole, the Duke of Alva and many Italian lords,

and with his guard of Spanish "archibugieri" and Spanish and German archers—he passed beneath triumphal arches and trophies to the Castello di Corte; and thence, after three days' continuous festival, to the Palace of Marmirolo, to continue his journey north to Germany. It was at this time that Lodovico Gonzaga, brother of the young Duke and third son (*b.* 1539) of the late Duke Federigo, had while still a child—for he was barely ten years old—come through his aunt, the Duchess d'Alençon, into that inheritance and title, later to prove so fatal to Mantua, of Duke of Nevers and Rethel; and lastly, Catherine of Austria, daughter of Ferdinand King of the Romans, had entered the city (October 1, 1549) as the wife destined by Charles for the young Duke Francesco Gonzaga.

Suddenly there came the tragedy which turned these rejoicings to sorrow. The young Duke Francesco had gone boating on the Mantuan lakes in pursuit of wild birds; the boat was upset, and he himself fell into the water. Saved by his courtiers, who were with him in other boats, and taken to the Castello, though every remedy was applied, "between the fear of drowning and the rigour of the season, he took a severe chill, and, becoming dangerously ill, after fifteen days died on February 21, 1550, at the age of some seventeen years." The whole city was plunged into mourning, and "the Duchesses" (*i.e.* his mother and his bride), "shutting themselves into one room, gave themselves up to the most intense grief and frantic laments, so that Don Ferrante, who had at that moment arrived, had difficulty to obtain entrance." It was arranged, after the funeral next day, that Duchess Margherita, with the Cardinal Ercole and Don Ferrante, should continue the Regency till it should be known whether the young Duchess would have any issue by her recent marriage; and Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga was sent for post-haste to Rome, whence he returned—from the Conclave which had elected Pope Julius III—on March 4, 1550. It would seem that Guglielmo, the second son, had been intended by his father Duke Federigo for an ecclesiastical career; and the Cardinal and his mother now suggested that he should stand aside, and let his brother Lodovico succeed to the Dukedom. But

Guglielmo himself took a different view of this matter, and held his ground with such firmness and good sense that he was eventually accepted—and even welcomed—by them as the new Duke ; and the Archduchess Caterina, when it became clear that she would have no child, was sent back to Germany on January 13, 1551, with a present from the Duke of 20,000 scudi and a diamond worth another 10,000, accompanied by the Cardinal and his escort as far as the frontier.

We now commence the long and important reign of Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga (1550–87), in which the riches and power of Mantua reached a very high level ; but it was not actually until 1558 that he began to conduct public affairs, still under the guidance of his mother and his uncle the Cardinal. There was undoubtedly a strain of physical weakness—and even actual deformity—in the Gonzaga family, possibly dating back as far as Paola Malatesta, wife of Gianfrancesco, the first Marquis, and which appeared in her granddaughter Susanna, who was rejected by Galeazzo Maria Sforza for this very reason ; possibly also in the ill-fated Dorothea, and certainly in Duke Guglielmo—as is suggested in the family group of himself and his son Vincenzo, with their respective wives, by Rubens, still preserved in the Reggia. But this did not prevent him developing into a very efficient ruler, and handing down his family ; while in these earlier years he had all the advantage of the wisdom and experience of his two uncles—the one a great soldier, the other a great statesman and prince of the Church.

In writing my first work on Mantua—which was very much concerned with her art and architecture—I scarcely did justice to this great figure of Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga, the favourite son of Isabella d'Este, for whom she had risked her life in going through the Sack of Rome. But when I came later to continue my Mantuan studies and research, and to specialize upon the Gonzaga themselves, I began then fully to realize what this figure of the great Cardinal Gonzaga was to Mantua, to Italy and the Church ; and if in my earlier chapters I have not hesitated to brand those crimes which led directly to the ruin of Italy, the division of Christendom and the Sack of Rome, here I can praise, as freely and unreservedly, one of those

characters in history who are the glory of the Church of Rome, and made her reform possible. To describe his career in detail would unfortunately carry me far beyond my subject-matter here. I can only do so in its connexion with Mantua, and allude to his administration of justice, which, after the death of Duke Federigo, reformed the abuses then existing, and set both civil and criminal law on a new basis ; to his patronage of Giulio Romano in the adornment of the city, her churches, and Cathedral, and the draining of her marshes ; to his care for the important commerce of Mantua and strict regulation of weights and measures, and to his statesmanship in keeping his own subjects at peace when war flamed out again in Monferrato and Parma between France, the Pope, and Emperor.¹

The year 1561, says the chronicler, was to Casa Gonzaga one of the most brilliant and happy. The honours of a Cardinalate had come to Francesco, brother of Don Cesare Gonzaga of Guastalla, and Cardinal Ercole himself had been elected as Papal Legate and President of the Council of Trent ; and in the tournament given by Alfonso d'Este at Ferrara Duke Guglielmo had taken part with success. Thence he returned to Mantua to superintend the preparations for his marriage with Eleonora of Austria, daughter of the Emperor Ferdinand ; and these preparations must have been extensive, for we hear of streets enlarged and rebuilt, notably those leading to the Piazza del Duomo, and the Corte Vecchia of the Castello itself amplified—some of the smaller rooms being destroyed to form a great stairway and salon for evening receptions. Finally, on April 26, 1561, the Archduchess Eleonora made her state entry into Mantua, coming from Cittadella di Porto, accompanied by many princes, knights and gentlemen, both German and Italian. Great were the rejoicings for this wedding, by which Duke Guglielmo became son-in-law of the Emperor and kinsman of the Kings of Poland and Bavaria, as well as of Alfonso d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, and Francesco de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany. There were tables spread for eight

¹ Cf. Volta, *op. cit.* Lib. xii. : "That which was closest to the heart of the Cardinal was to keep his subjects at peace." In 1554 he produced legislation in dealing severely with the use of unripe grapes for vintage, with debts contracted by minors, and established a just scale of weights and measures, with models in bronze and marble kept always accessible to the public.

days for the strangers (*forestieri*) present, and on April 29 the Mantuan nobles gave a sham fight in the Corte del Castello, while on May 1 the public tournament lasted until evening ; but the people seem to have taken advantage of the licence for rejoicing to rob the Jewish quarter of the city, and, in the ensuing confusion, the Archivio del Commune was set on fire and documents of great public importance destroyed.¹

It was now considered that a chapel was needed to complete the magnificent Palazzo di Corte, and, in 1562, Duke Guglielmo commenced the Church of S. Barbara in Corte—that “ Chiesa Regio Ducale di S. Barbera ” of which Cadioli remarks that “ within and without it was of an order which combines the Doric and Corinthian . . . and is particularly admirable for its majesty and just proportions of the whole and its parts.”² This praise of the old writer does not seem to me excessive. When I last visited the Ducal church, lighted from the roof and draped that day in rich crimson and gold, I admired these proportions within ; but as fine, or yet finer, are those of the beautiful tower, which rises beside its church in the centre of the vast Corte, and does honour to that great Mantuan architect Giovanbattista Bertani.³ Cadioli gives a detailed account of the pictures which then adorned this church, of which perhaps the most interesting was “ The Beheading of S. Barbara,” by Domenico Brusasorci (a painter to be found in Verona, and reminiscent of Paolo Veronese), which I found still in its place above the high altar, “ *in fondo al coro.*” In this church, he tells us, were then hung “ the nine pieces of tapestry representing the Acts of the Apostles,” which have been since the Great War restored to Mantua from Vienna, and are now within the

¹ The position of the Jews in Mantua, a rich commercial centre, is one of great interest and, as Dr. Luzio has suggested, merits a special study. They were evidently wealthy and influential enough to cause great jealousy, which found expression in periodical “ pogroms.”

² *Vide* Cadioli, *op. cit.*, 1763.

³ Duke Guglielmo entrusted the design and building of this Ducal church to Bertani, who completed it between 1562 and 1565, the marble tablet still existing within S. Barbara confirming this date: “ *Jo. Baptista Bertanus architectus ex Gul. Ducis Mantuæ III sententia templum et turrim extruxit MDLXV.*” Some years earlier the same architect had remodelled the interior of the Cathedral of S. Peter in Mantua, working on Giulio’s design.

Reggia ; “it is enough that I tell you that the design is the work of Raffaello Sanzio of Urbino to make you understand of what value they are.”¹ The church, he adds, was designed to accommodate the magnificent catafalques used in the interment of the Gonzaga princes ; and here too they could be present at Mass in their private seats above the choir, which was connected by a special staircase with the Castello di Corte.

I shall speak a little later of the trade of Mantua, but it is evident at this time that, in spite of trouble from drought, it was most flourishing. In 1564 we are told that Mantua had reached a population of 43,000 ; and that in the Borgo S. Giorgio there were more than a thousand workers in silk and cloth, with at least fifty “fabbriche” of these industries in the city. The Mantuan cloth was, as we shall see later, then highly thought of, even in France and England. Through the long peace she had enjoyed and the extension of her trade, Mantua had now become one of the richest cities of Europe. At the same time all seemed well with Casa Gonzaga. Duke Guglielmo had made a brilliant marriage, which brought him still closer to the Imperial Court ; and in September of 1562 a son, Vincenzo, had been born to carry on his title. I do not think it would be too much to say that this date marks the very high-water mark of the Gonzaga prosperity ; that from this time onward elements began to work which were—very slowly, but not less surely—to undermine their greatness, and to end in their complete and irretrievable ruin.

In 1556 Don Ferrante Gonzaga had returned at length to Guastalla, and gave himself up to his affairs there and to his own subjects, who, in his long absences on military commands, had been governed indifferently. But he was again recalled by the King of Spain to direct operations against the French in Flanders, and had a great part in the victory which compelled them (1557) to surrender St. Quentin. The fatigues of

¹ These fine tapestries were acquired by Cardinal Ercole during his Regency, and left by his will (1563) to his nephew, Duke Guglielmo, to adorn this very Church of S. Barbara. They were in a later age removed to the Reggia, to a suite of rooms specially prepared for them. In 1866 they were taken to Vienna, but are now happily restored to the Reggia.



THE MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES



S. PAUL PREACHING AT ATHENS

FROM THE TAPESTRIES BY RAPHAEL NOW IN THE REGGIA OF THE GONZAGA

this last campaign proved fatal to him; and he died on November 16, 1557, leaving to his eldest son, Don Cesare, the principality of Guastalla, and recommending him to the prudent counsel of Cardinal Ercole. His body was brought back to Mantua, and there buried. The founder of the Lords of Guastalla, a great prince and soldier, in whom the tradition of the family as Condottieri was nobly continued, his death was a great loss to Casa Gonzaga: a yet greater one was to follow.

Against his own wish, Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga had been deputed, as we have seen, to become President of the Council of Trent; and had been received in that city by its Bishop and clergy, and reopened that august assembly on January 18, 1562, inflamed by the great hope of bringing its labours to a better conclusion. Duke Guglielmo had come to be present at the opening; and all accounts do justice to the work achieved by the Cardinal in this famous Council of the Church. But he was not to be permitted to accomplish the task then before him. He had just received the news (January 6, 1563) of the election to the Cardinalate of Federigo Gonzaga—his own nephew, and the brother of Duke Guglielmo—when he was overtaken by an illness, which very soon became serious and fatal. Duke Guglielmo, being at the time with Don Cesare Gonzaga at Innsbruck to do homage to the Emperor, hurried back to Trento in time to be present at his uncle's holy death on the evening of March 2, 1563. "His funeral procession," we are told, "presented a wonderful spectacle; for not only many Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, Abbots, Ambassadors, Theologians, and Doctors of the Church were present, but every class of citizen shed tears, considering what a support had been lost for Christianity, and what a father for the poor." His body was brought back, escorted by Don Cesare, to Mantua, where the funeral rites were renewed in the Cathedral. He had assigned by his will to the Sacro Monte di Pietà 37,000 scudi for the benefit of the needy, 25,000 to his servants, and 4000 to found a College of Jesuits, with annual provision for its maintenance; after other legacies he made his nephews Guglielmo, Lodovico, and Federigo his heirs.

He stands out, a great figure in Church and State, as a link between the brilliant age of the Renaissance in the days of his mother Isabella and this new and changed Italy of the counter-Reformation. To his intellectual gifts and profound judgment in politics he added "purity of character, firmness of soul, severity of morals, so that no human force could ever move him from his wise proposals." Such scholars as Bembo could praise him, the most powerful monarchs respect him, the Fathers of the Council venerate him, and the people of Lombardy love him tenderly—for in the days of famine they had known his pity and unbounded charity. He was very nearly elected to the Papacy, and not excluded for his demerits, but rather from excess of merit, or perhaps from envy; but that opposition never led him into any small resentment, or to neglect his duties. In administering for so many years the State for his young nephews, amid wars and changing conditions in Italy, he never sought his own personal advantage. He loved strict and even justice, he sought to keep his own subjects in peace, and he died at last covered with their most sincere benedictions.

I have just had occasion to mention Don Cesare Gonzaga of Guastalla (1523-75), whose portrait medal by Pietro Paolo Galeotti is preserved in the British Museum; but at this point of our story it becomes almost necessary to include some account of other branches of Casa Gonzaga, who were ruling their lands without the city.

In an earlier chapter I mentioned as two great dangers to the dynasty that power of Milan, which had now ceased to exist, and family dissensions—guarded against later by generally putting the second son into the Church, with the hope of a Cardinalate; but I have now to mention another peril, which we shall find in a later age to become very serious, derived from the Gonzaga rulers established without. This trouble seems to have begun with the will of Marquis Lodovico, who (1478) had divided among his sons the Mantuan State; to Cardinal Francesco and Gianfrancesco the lands of Viadana, Sabbioneta, Rivarolo, Bozzolo, and Isola Dovarese, with the condition of reciprocal succession; to Ridolfo and the Protonotary Lodovico those of Canneto, Ostiano, Castelfreddo,

Castiglione del Stiviere and Solferino, under the same conditions; to his first-born, Federigo, the succession to what remained. "This dismemberment of the State," says Dr. Luzio very justly, "brought within itself the inevitable decadence of Casa Gonzaga. One remedy alone could be effectual—the absolute subordination of these lesser Gonzaga to the Lords of Mantua—to diminish the consequences of the unjust division of 1478: but the strong individuality of the Gonzaga race took away all hopes based upon a rigid family discipline. None showed themselves more adverse to such subjection than the Gonzaga of Bozzolo, either because they disposed of territories which were relatively attractive, or because they abounded in strong personalities of both sexes. There rise at once to our lips the names of Federigo da Bozzolo, of Luigi Rodomonte, of Vespasiano Gonzaga, of famous prelates such as Bishop Lodovico, Cardinal Scipione the friend of Tasso, and for his saintly life Fra Francesco, Bishop of Cefalú; while among the women there has been handed down to us the fascination over their contemporaries of Giulia and Lucrezia Gonzaga, and all those daughters of the prolific and long-lived Antonia del Balzo, who married into the great houses of the Regno of Naples and of Germany, and thus added to the honours of the Bozzolo line."¹

Among these Gonzaga princes of Bozzolo and Sabbioneta no figure is more outstanding than that of Vespasiano. Sabbioneta had been among the possessions of Carlo Gonzaga, but after his defeat and death (1456)² had reverted to Marquis Lodovico, and been left by this latter to his two sons Cardinal Francesco and Gianfrancesco, who took it entirely on the Cardinal's demise. When fighting in the Regno of Naples this Gianfrancesco had fallen in love with the beautiful Antonia del Balzo, Princess of Altamura, had married her, and had four sons and several daughters. He was succeeded by his eldest

¹ I have mentioned in an earlier chapter the fine portrait medal by L'Antico of this Antonia del Balzo, the friend of Isabella d'Este, with its interesting reverse.

² *Vide* Chapter V. It may be remembered here that the trouble had already begun by the lands beyond the Po to the west—including Rivarolo, Bozzolo, and Sabbioneta—being bequeathed to Carlo, but had been averted in that case by their forfeiture at his death.

son Lodovico, the father of Luigi, called Rodomonte, a famous Captain who took part in the Sack of Rome (*vide* Chapter VIII.), helped the Pope to escape from Castel S. Angelo, and was rewarded by seeing his brother made a Cardinal. He had married Isabella, daughter of a famous beauty, Giulia Colonna ; and had by her one son, Vespasiano, when he was himself killed by an arquebus shot in 1530. Brought up by his aunt, Madonna Giulia, while still young Vespasiano went to Valladolid in Spain, as page to Prince Philip, son of Charles V.

A whole legend has grown up around this ruler of Sabbioneta—that little old-world, almost forgotten city within the Mantovano, which well repays a visit. Coming there from Mantua, in the summer heat of a June day, the whole place seemed buried in profound slumber. One noble arch, now almost among the fields, bearing the Gonzaga eagles and the motto, "*Libertas*,"¹ with the name of Vespasiano, Duke of Sabbioneta, and the date MDLXXIX, showed us that we were approaching the little capital ; and rousing the *custode* from her midday slumber, we soon found ourselves in the older Ducal palace (now the Palazzo Municipio), with its wonderful trabeated ceilings, set round with shields and adorned with portraits of the earlier Gonzaga, among whom I recognized Lodovico and Marchesa Barbara.

Before us here were the mounted figures of the four Gonzaga rulers of Sabbioneta—Gianfrancesco, Lodovico, Luigi, and Vespasiano ; and in the Church of the Incoronata we found the tomb of Vespasiano by the sculptor Leone Leoni, showing the Duke himself (*Vespasianus D. G. Dux. Sabion.*), a bronze figure in Roman armour, seated, with arm outstretched as in command. A legend of terror has gathered round this Duke, who was certainly one of the most remarkable figures of his time. A soldier by profession, he had fallen madly in love with the beautiful Diana de Cardona, and carried her off from a rival ; but informed secretly, on his return home from war in Piedmont, that his adored wife had betrayed him, he

¹ This motto, "*Libertas*," was chosen to express, not that of his subjects, but the attitude of haughty independence which Vespasiano always maintained towards his cousin, Duke Guglielmo of Mantua. "In their abundant correspondence this ill-repressed rivalry breaks out in almost every line." See *L'Archivio de' Gonzaga di Mantova*, vol. ii.



DUKE VESPASIANO GONZAGA

FROM THE BRONZE FIGURE BY LEONE LEONI IN THE CHURCH OF THE INCORONATA AT SABBIONETA

killed her lover and then forced her to drink poison.¹ The account given by himself of this ghastly tragedy to his aunt Giulia and his cousin Guglielmo is that "it pleased God to call to Himself my wife suddenly by an apoplexy, before she could utter a word." Years after, the son of her lover, Raineri, as he grew up, had ventured to censure his father's fate ; shut up very soon within the Castello, the lad was found next morning with his throat cut. Returning later to Spain, Vespasiano fell in love with Anna of Aragon, sister to the Duke of Segorbia and related to his patron King Philip himself, and married her in Valencia in March of 1564 ; he had been made Marquis of the Empire, and had now a son born to him, called Luigi after his grandfather. But here again a mysterious tragedy darkened his new married life. Princess Anna suddenly left Sabbioneta to live alone at Rivarolo, abandoned to profound despair, refusing to see even her own children, and died there in the same year (1567) ; and her husband, writing to a friend, uses the significant words—"Without my name is honoured . . . in my own house there is shame."

There remained his son Luigi, the delight of his father, the heir to his high honours ; but, once again, even here his evil destiny asserts itself. The boy, then fifteen years of age, when riding out with his companions, had passed his father without returning his salute ; reproved for his carelessness, he replied with impertinence, and received from his father a kick in the groin from which in a very short time he died. Yet this same man—this "Bluebeard" of a terrible legend—was loved by his own subjects, and sought to make of his Sabbioneta a little Athens, an ideal city of art and letters. In the age of the Inquisition he had the tolerance—or the temerity—to set up a Hebrew printing press ; the mint which he opened (1559-91) in Sabbioneta is yet famous in the annals of numismatics ; the beautiful Teatro Olimpico, which yet survives, was designed for him by the great architect Scamozzi ;

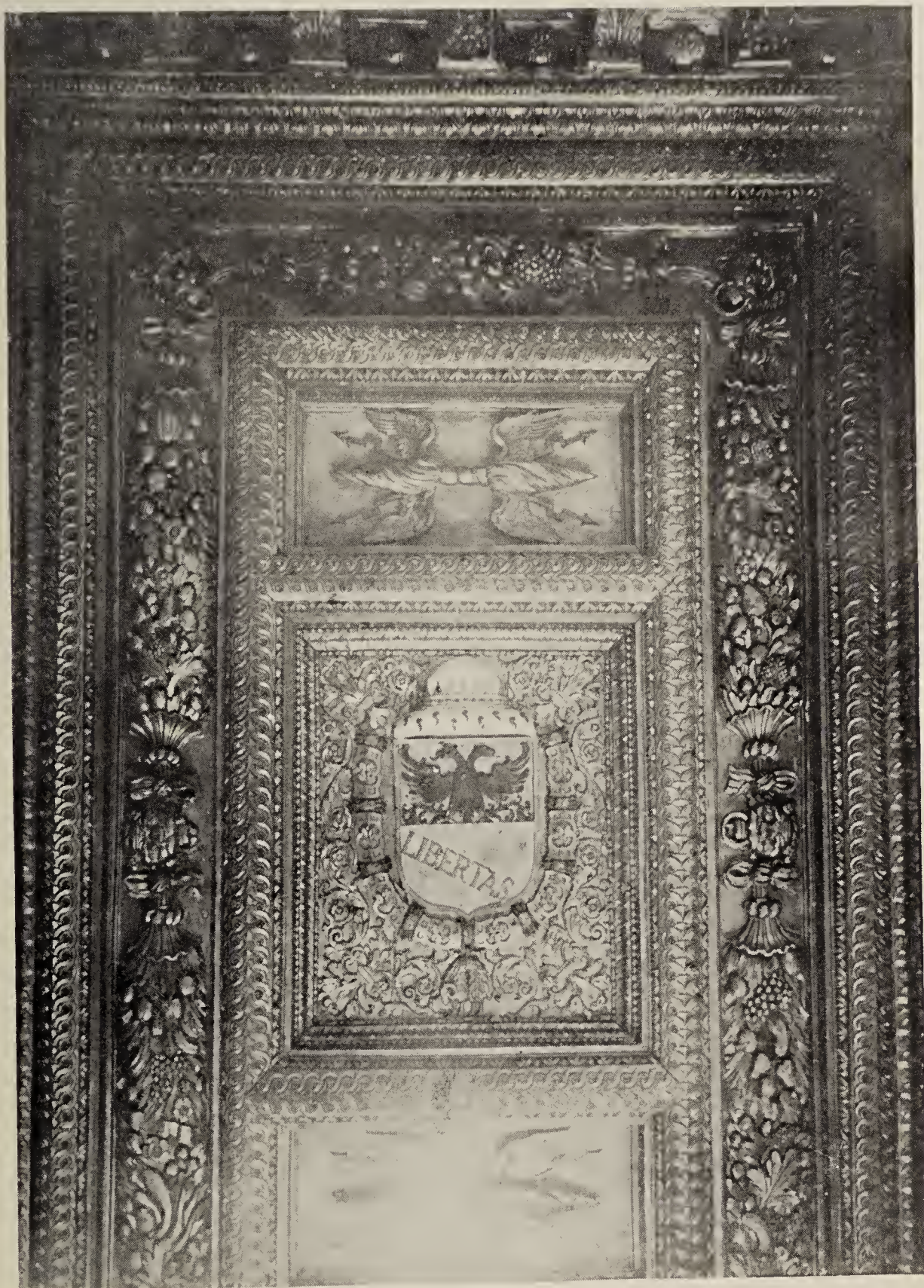
¹ Dr. Luzio calls into some question this and other details of the legend, and justly criticizes the version of Racheli (1849), who treated it "à la Dumas," showing the guilty wife shut up for three days with her lover's dead body, and Vespasiano returning ever with the poisoned cup and the terrible command "*bevi*"—till at last, overcome by the horrors of her situation, she had placed it to her lips.

the palace which he built for himself—his Palace of the Garden (Palazzo del Giardino)—I found a thing of wonderful beauty, almost a rival upon a smaller scale of Giulio's Mantuan Palace of the Te. The long line of Sale and Camerini are adorned with frescoes—yet lovely even in their decay—picturing the story of Orpheus, of Æneas, of Phæthon, of Philyra, the daughter of Oceanus beloved of Saturn, by Bernadino Campi, Fornarello and other painters, whose "Gabinetto delle Grazie" remains as a decorative masterpiece; while on the other side extends the noble "Galleria degli Antichi," yet intact and built to hold Vespasiano's collection of antique sculptures, which remained there until 1772, when they were despoiled by the Austrians, then masters of Mantua.¹

Later in life, Duke Vespasiano had married a third time, choosing his kinswoman, Margherita Gonzaga, sister to Don Ferrante III, Lord of Guastalla; but there was no issue of this marriage. Meanwhile, his only daughter Isabella had married Luigi Caraffa, Prince of Stigliano, into whose hands Sabbioneta passed when Vespasiano died in 1591, at the age of fifty-nine. But the little city of the Gonzaga still remains, with its wonderful treasures of the past, its churches, palaces, theatre—forgotten, neglected, asleep, as if abandoned to slow decay. Is it too much to hope that some day Mantua and Italy will awake to the value of her past treasures, and take better care and provision for their maintenance?

Meantime, Don Cesare Gonzaga, ruling at Guastalla, was no less busied in embellishing and strengthening by fortifications his own little capital, whither he had returned from Mantua to reside in 1567. It was the age of literary Academies, and in Mantua this Prince had founded (1562) the "Accademia degli Invaghiti," honoured especially by Pope Pius IV. Like Vespasiano, he too collected works of art, and had founded in Guastalla a Museum of Antiquities; when he died (1575) he left his little State—under the guardianship of his wife Camilla

¹ Gian Francesco Marini, in his *Sabbioneta, Piccola Atene* (1914), with just resentment has called this a "criminal decree." The list of the treasures then taken still exists, and many of them found their way into the Museo Civico of Mantua. "The Gallery of Sabbioneta," adds the writer, "is now squalid in its nudity . . . is it an impossible dream to desire that they" (these sculptures) "should be returned into the place which was erected for them?"



CEILING IN PALACE OF SABBIONETA
WITH ARMS OF DUKE VESPASIANO

Borromeo, whom he had married in 1560—to his young son Ferrante III.¹ To the Gonzaga Lords of Castiglione delle Stiviere—descended from Rodolfo, son of Marquis Lodovico and uncle of Francesco, who had fallen fighting bravely in the battle of the Taro—I shall return in a later chapter, when they will claim their place in our story. A fiercely passionate breed were these men, who seemed to vary between ferocious tyranny and saintly purity—the contrast is most marked in S. Luigi Gonzaga and his brothers—and were finally cast forth for ever by a maddened people.

During the period we have lately traversed, Duke Guglielmo, representing the direct line of Casa Gonzaga in Mantua, had become one of the leading princes of Italy. From the Emperor (1573) he had received the added title of Duke of Monferrato ; and with the Dukes of Savoy and Ferrara he went (1574) to meet Henry, King of France, at Venice, and brought back that monarch to visit him at Mantua, as his guest in the Castello and at Marmiolo. His courage and charity are recorded in the visitation of the plague in 1567, when this Duke refused to join his family at Revere ; and remained in the city beside his people, opening his treasury for their needs, and turning churches and convents into hospitals to fight the dreaded disease, which carried off more than ten thousand victims in the city within one year. In June of the year following (1577), it began to abate ; and a solemn procession was made (to be repeated yearly) to S. Sebastiano, to give thanks to God for this deliverance and mercy.

The young Prince Don Vincenzo, the Duke's eldest son, was now to marry Margherita, daughter of Alessandro Farnese, Duke of Parma, who then governed for the King of Spain in Flanders. The bride entered from Parma with her escort by Porta Pusterla on April 30, 1581, being received by Duke Guglielmo in the Palace of the Te ; and the wedding was celebrated with great rejoicings and “ an incredible concourse

¹ This Camilla Borromeo was sister of the famous S. Carlo Borromeo and niece of Pope Pius IV. A sister of Don Cesare and daughter of Ferrante was Ippolita Gonzaga, who died in 1563, at the age of twenty-eight. Famed for her beauty and literary attainments, in which Cardinal Ercole himself had taken interest, she married Fabrizio Colonna, Duke of Mondragone ; there were three medals of this lady.

of people," the Dukes of Ferrara and Parma and Cardinal Alessandro Farnese being among the guests. Next year came the marriage of Duke Guglielmo's daughter, Anna Caterina, with Archduke Ferdinand of Austria; but meanwhile trouble had arisen between Prince Vincenzo and his bride, and "finding her impotent to give him children he returned her to her own home." The quarrel became a public scandal—almost a *cause célèbre*. The great family of the Farnese were exasperated; doctors and theologians consulted; even the saintly Cardinal Borromeo charged by the Pope to give his judgment. Finally the marriage was dissolved (October 12, 1583); and Margherita Farnese returned to Parma to end her days—by the Cardinal's counsel—within a convent.

It was, however, Duke Guglielmo's pressing desire that his son Vincenzo should be married, "not only to have male heirs, but still more to take him from a dissolute life, to which he was too much inclined"; and the new bride now arranged for him was Eleonora, daughter of Francesco de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany. There had been reports going about Italy (spread perhaps or repeated by the embittered Farnese) that Vincenzo's too free life had unfitted him for the married state; but the consent of the Medici Granduca was obtained, and the wedding took place at Florence on April 29, 1584, with great splendour, the bride bringing with her a dowry of 300,000 scudi d'oro. Young, good-looking, free with his money and not too choice in his companions, the Prince was certainly an anxiety to his father, whose character—careful, methodical, somewhat pietistic—was the very antithesis to all this.¹ But it is fair to Prince Vincenzo to mention here his generous treatment of Torquato Tasso, whom he had known when the poet was in Mantua with Scipione Gonzaga in 1578.

¹ Duke Guglielmo (1564) had made S. Barbara a Basilica under the direct jurisdiction of Rome, and had obtained (1572) from S. Andrea, for this his own church, a drop of the Most Precious Blood; while in Alberti's great Basilica he placed his own statue kneeling in devotion. He was less friendly than his uncle, the Cardinal Ercole, to the now all-powerful Society of Jesus, which at this time had brought four Japanese converts to Italy. Coming from Rome (1584), they were welcomed by Prince Vincenzo at Marmirolo, lodged in the Castello, "being treated like sovereigns," and duly taken, on July 14, to S. Andrea.

Hearing that he was imprisoned at Ferrara, the Prince used every influence with Duke Alfonso to obtain this gifted and unhappy writer's liberty; and finally "had the satisfaction of bringing him back to Mantua, where the poet stayed a year in the castle of the Gonzaga, always visited by Vincenzo, who loved him sincerely." ¹

Another story in which he figures at this time is less creditable to Prince Vincenzo's memory, but is of such interest—especially to British readers—that I cannot pass it by. In the spring following Prince Vincenzo's first unhappy marriage (February, 1582), a young Scotchman, named James Crichton—whose name has come down to history (and even modern English drama) as "the Admirable Crichton"—had come to Mantua to enter the service of Duke Guglielmo. His talents and varying attainments were the astonishment of his contemporaries. At Paris we are told that his dialectics and sword-play had gained him equal admiration. At Venice he had the inspiration of the great printer Aldus Manutius, and his disputations on mathematics, theology, and philosophy had filled the vast Church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo with enthusiastic listeners; while at Padua, that ancient home of learning, he fairly wins our sympathies by "an impassioned oration in praise of ignorance"!

From Venice he had now found his way to Mantua, and may have had some charge there in connexion with the education of the young Prince. "His versatile talents here found new opportunities. In the Court theatre, which was burnt down some ten years later, he played fifteen different characters in succession, holding his audience, it is said, absorbed through five hours of brilliant comedy. Nor had he forgotten his Parisian skill of fence. A notorious duellist, who had vanquished the best swordsmen of Italy, found his match in Crichton—and his life's end. But his victor did not escape from envy and malice: it was even said that the Prince's mistress had been seen to cast an encouraging glance at the brilliant young scholar." ² What seems certain, indeed, from James Crichton's letters to Zibramonte, Duke Guglielmo's secretary and his own friend at Court, is that at this time, in

¹ Cf. Volta, *op. cit.*

² Vide Selwyn Brinton, *Mantua, op. cit.* ch. xi.

spite of his success, he felt far from assured or happy. Money difficulties—for his position at Court must have entailed many expenses—may have been an anxiety, and the reason of his visit (in April 1582) to Venice, to see his friend and patron Jacopo Aloyse Cornaro. After six weeks spent there, he returned to Mantua; and here again his letters show mental distress from some treatment received at Court.¹

The summer now had come, and on July 3, after a day of that intense heat which Mantua can offer, late at night, in the coolness and quiet, Crichton had left the Reggia, followed by his servant, to stroll through the shadowy porticoes and silent squares. Last night, in the old city, I followed his very footsteps in that tragic adventure. From my seat beneath the blossoming lime trees I had seen the full moon rise behind the Reggia, leaving that vast sombre mass with its Ghibelline battlements still in shadow; then I descended past the great clock-tower, with Madonna poised on the crescent moon, whose great dial the young Scot may have then looked on for the last time ere he passed that noble façade—"Romanamente superba"—of S. Andrea, and came under the arcades into the little Piazza del Purgio.

Here the street—then Via S. Silvestro, now Via del Magistrato—narrows, going direct into the city; and, as Crichton has just entered it, two masked figures approach him. One gives him a rude push, and thrusts him from the side next the wall, passing on at once; but Crichton, indignant at the affront and no safe man to insult, draws his sword and challenges his provoker's companion. Hearing the clash of arms, the first mask turns back . . . there are a few moments of deadly strife . . . the second of his assailants falls mortally wounded, and Crichton, wounded himself, cries to the man who had given him his death-blow: 'Forgive me, Your Highness; I only recognize you now.'"²

¹ See *The Last Days of the Admirable Crichton*, by Lily Eglantine Marshall. Reprinted for *Scots Lore*, Glasgow, 1895.

² The story came down that Crichton recognized the Prince, handed him his sword with the words just quoted; and that Vincenzo received it, and then ran him through the body. This charge of cowardly murder cannot be established, and must therefore be withdrawn; for, as we shall see, the only witness left was the Prince himself. But it may be permitted to ask whether

Such is the Prince's account, who was the only witness to survive ; for Crichton's servant escaped, and was never seen again ; his first assailant, Lanzoni, died immediately, and he himself very shortly after. His body was left with the apothecary where he died, and after eight days was thrust into a tarred coffin and buried, without any solemn office, in the little Church of S. Simone. But the matter could not be hushed so easily ; for the young Scot was well known and a general favourite. There was a scandal in the city and throughout Italy ; and the Prince, to defend himself, sent a letter, dated Mantua, July 27, 1582, to the Bishop of Osimo, giving substantially the account stated above. "The push was a mistake, and intended as a joke. The Scot, not knowing me at first, aimed a blow, which I parried ; he sought to ward off my thrust with his poniard, but did not succeed and it wounded him in the breast. Having recognized me, he began to beg for his life. . . . It was a case of pure misadventure, and if I had been dealing with any one but a ' barbarian ' so much harm would not have followed. (Signed) THE PRINCE OF MANTUA." The letter is of a piece with the character of the writer, and leaves us unconvinced. Poor Crichton when he died was but twenty-two years of age ; his brilliant career was thus untimely ended ; his name and attainments soon forgotten, or disparaged even by those who once had been proud to be his friends.

In the past years of his long and successful reign Duke Guglielmo had been making of the Gonzaga castle of Goito "a delightful dwelling-place" (*delizioso soggiorno*), constructing there a wonderful palace—a cool place of retreat with its many fountains, flowing streams, and shady groves. Here it

it is likely that one of the best swordsmen of his time would have permitted a mere boy to come clean through his guard at the first lunge (this was sword and dagger work), and still more have ever stooped to beg for his life ? With thirty years' experience as a fencer, and some knowledge of law, I venture to interpret—though purely as a surmise—this dark story as follows : Vincenzo issues late at night from some revel, primed for mischief, with a companion whom his father disapproved, and, knowing him or not, plays his stupid prank on Crichton. The latter, on recognizing his assailant, at once lowers his guard, with the words of apology as quoted ; and the Prince—perhaps half-drunk or mad with anger—runs him through the body. The inquiry, which should have been made, is hushed up ; the servant, the only witness, got out of the way.

was that—retiring from the summer heats at the end of June (1586), and leaving to his Ministers, Donato and Petrozzani, the care of State affairs—he was surprised by a slow fever, and died, “after practising all the acts of religion,” on August 14 of that year. His body was brought back to Mantua, and buried in solemn state before the high altar of S. Barbara in Corte, the Palace Church of his foundation, amid the tears of his subjects. He had lived forty-nine years and reigned thirty-seven—“too few for the advantage of his citizens and country”; and his reign marks, as I have suggested, the highest level of Gonzaga prosperity. Amid the full praises of the chronicler—“he was of a spirit loyal and open, above all belief an observer of justice,” though subject to sudden fits of anger—we seem to trace a character meticulous, formally religious, careful of his health and money. Jealous of the rights of his subjects, he had given himself to the study of law, both civil and criminal, with such success that his judgments were prized by neighbouring princes, his name set by Venice in her Golden Book. He kept his health, though naturally far from robust, by a careful régime. He filled his Court with learned men, himself “a man of letters and connoisseur of the arts”—forming a great library and loving specially music and architecture. In his later years he robbed himself even of sleep to devote a few hours every day to the offices of religion; and, though he could spend freely on such a building as S. Barbara—which cost him 150,000 scudi d’oro, and his Palace of Goito, with its gardens, the double of this—and no less freely on great public occasions, such as visits of princes and their entertainment, and he kept a flourishing Court,—but with little display—his was always full.¹

Now Duke Vincenzo—of whose character we have seen something—was to rule in his stead, and on September 22, 1587, assumed the reins of government. From this time forward it is that the Gonzaga power begins to decline; but for the moment all seemed well, and the coronation of the new Duke was of unexampled splendour. At Mass in the

¹ The characters of both father and son come before us in Rubens’ fine family group—of Duke Guglielmo himself, his son Vincenzo, with his handsome empty face, and their respective wives—now in the Reggia.



DUKE GUGLIELMO AND VINCENZO GONZAGA WITH THEIR WIVES

FROM THE PAINTING BY RUBENS IN THE REGGIA OF THE GONZAGA

Cathedral on the day of his accession, the Princes of Casa Gonzaga were beside him—among them Don Ferrante Gonzaga, Duke of Guastalla, and the Ambassador of Scipione Gonzaga, the nephew of the great Cardinal Ercole and patron of men of letters—with Prince Doria and the Ministers of every nation. The luxury and richness of the dresses then worn, we are told, was incredible, especially that of Duke Vincenzo, whose cap (*berretta*) and crown, with a great carbuncle set therein, were alone worth 150,000 scudi; and his dress and long mantle of white satin, covered with gold and gems, the double of this. Seated upon a lofty throne in the entrance of the Cathedral, he received the homage of his people, and, touching the Gospels, rose to promise to attend to their happiness and give impartial justice; and next, suddenly made the announcement of the perpetual abolition of half the duty on wine—an act of grace hailed with general acclamation to the sound of music and firing of artillery. Then he rode through the city, preceded by his “archibugieri a cavallo,” with, close behind him, the Gonzaga and Doria Princes, and followed by sixty gentlemen of the Ducal Guard in coats of black velvet trimmed with lace of gold, with gold chains about their necks, and wearing plumed hats embroidered with pearls and silver. Before the Duke rode his treasurer, at every step throwing to the people money of gold and silver, spending in this way some 10,000 ducats; and the baldacchino, of cloth of silver, was held over Duke Vincenzo by twelve of the chief officers of the Arts, while behind came Ministers, courtiers, and squadrons of knights richly dressed and armed with lances. A splendid pageant it was, surely—“the like of which Mantua perhaps had never seen: and truth to tell, he should have been the very paragon (*prodigo*) of princes had he not been carried too far by the desire of appearing magnificent and liberal, and above all by the passion for a licentious life, which made him spend immense sums on keeping constantly about him musicians and women of the theatre.”¹

It is, in fact, open to question whether the abolition, in perpetuity, of valuable taxes—such as the “dazio” on wine—and even throwing away money with both hands, was the best

¹ *Vide Volta, op. cit.*, 1587.

financial policy ; most of all when Mantuan trade was losing ground against foreign competition. The old Guild system had been fully developed in the city of the Gonzaga, and in A.D. 1300 already the Arts of Notai, Lanaioli, Calzolari, Macellai, Speziali, Tessitori di Lana were legally constituted—these forming together the “ Università Maggiore.” Though there was no distinction, as in Florence, between Greater and Lesser Arts, the Bankers, Orefici (goldsmiths), the Falegnami and Pescatori had their special statutes ; but the “ Arte della Seta ” does not appear as a corporation until the sixteenth century. The different Arts had judiciary powers, but disputes above ten soldi went before the Consuls of the University ; contributions were paid to the “ Paratici ” of the Arts, and work was obligatory on days not feast days, and within the prescribed hours. Together all the Arts celebrated with great pomp the feast of S. Silvester on the last day of the year, when the names of new officers were selected ; they were also Benefit Societies, in the sense that sick members were visited by the “ Paratici,” funeral expenses paid, and help given to the needy in money, food and even cloth. This organization survived until 1786, when finally, in 1787, “ the Università Maggiore ” was suppressed.

The special pride of Mantua, in her earlier days, and the source of much of her wealth was the trade in cloth, the “ Arte della Lana.” In the fourteenth century it was already powerful, and in the century following was exporting not to Italy alone, but as far east as Asia Minor, as far north as the Black Sea. Almost every family then spun and wove at home ; and the wool was the special care of the women of the house. In the middle of the sixteenth century it is reckoned that there were no less than 128 looms at work in the city for cloth-weaving alone, giving employment to at least 3000 persons.¹ The fall of this great and powerful art was sudden and dramatic ; in a very few years more than 100 looms were idle ; the 128 reduced at the close of the century, under Duke Vincenzo’s rule, to about 20 alone ! What were the causes of this sudden and disastrous collapse ?

¹ Cf. A. Portidi, *Le corporazioni artigiane di Mantova* (1884, Mantua), for these and other details.

First and foremost, the development of cloth-weaving in France and England, and of cloth factories, established in part with the help of Italian workmen, which very soon began to turn out cloth of finer quality than the article of home production. In their distress the Mantuan cloth-weavers (*lanaioli*) began to ask help of their Duke against the importation of foreign cloth ; but the first to set a bad example in buying this cloth was the Duke himself, and his extravagant rule, with the taxation which it brought, only helped to complete the ruin. The Mantuan weavers could only sell their cloth to the poorer class ; and hence produced less cloth, and that of an inferior quality.

In the old days the seat of the Art was between the Palazzo Municipale, the Viccolo della Paglia and the old Via del Magistrato ; and up to 1866 their arms—the same as those of the “ Arte della Lana ” at Florence, a lamb holding with his foot a white flag with a red cross—were to be seen on their “ Sala di Riunione ” in the courtyard of the “ stallo della Paglia.” Here was the “ residenza,” the centre of their guild life ; here the shops for the cloth brought in from the countryside, while without was the place of “ purga,” for cleaning of the fleeces which came in direct from the animals, hence called the “ Purgo ”—which name survives to this day in the Piazza del Purgo. The art was efficiently organized, and used every known method for its cloth to come out perfect and clean (*perfetta e pulita*), as we can trace from the documents ; it was regulated by special statutes under both the Bonacolsi and Gonzaghi—those of the Gonzaga being most precise as to the manner of weaving and the quality of cloth—and there was woven here also cloth of gold (*pannos aureos*), like that made in Florence as late as the sixteenth century.

The art of silk-weaving—“ Arte della Seta ”—came later, as I have mentioned, in the middle of the sixteenth century ; but soon made notable progress, especially under Federigo II, first Duke of Mantua, so that it became as important as that of the “ Lana ”—this Prince giving special privileges and exemptions to weavers of silk, and encouraging them to come into the city from without. Under the wise Regency of Cardinal Ercole, during the minority of Francesco II, the silk-weavers

(*settaioli*) became numerous and powerful enough to make their own statutes, which received the Regent's approval (December 19, 1543). This silk-weaving was, of course, by hand; but Duke Vincenzo proposed (1610) to use water-power—as was already done so effectively in the case of the Mantuan mills—and formed a sort of Company, with a Jew called Moisè Bonaventura, and the Rector of the “Arte della Lana” and another as directors. This scheme was actually carried out; but before long got into difficulties, and shared the downward path of Mantuan industry at the period now before us.

Meanwhile, on the outside all seemed well. The new Duke made a brave show, and, visiting Florence (1589) for the wedding of the Grand Duke Ferdinando de' Medici with Cristina of Lorraine, spent on this occasion more than 100,000 ducats. The important fortress of Casale in Monferrato, which had been set in order by Duke Guglielmo, was further strengthened (1590) by his son, “to hold in check the pretensions of the Duke of Savoy to the Duchy of Monferrato.” In this year came bad rains to ruin the crops, and a fire in the Reggia burnt out the Teatro di Corte and the great armoury, with the trophies of his Gonzaga ancestors; and though Duke Vincenzo sought to replace these with a new collection, the loss must have been irreparable.

Three leading figures now passed away from Casa Gonzaga. In that same year Vespasiano Gonzaga had died, the warrior and the ruler whose strange story I have related; and two years later Cardinal Scipione Gonzaga, one of the great and cultured churchmen of that House, famous as a theologian, yet the friend of Tasso—who sent to him his *Gerusalemme Liberata*—and of Guarini, who entrusted the *Pastor Fido* to his correction.¹ Then came the death (1594) of Archduchess Eleonora, widow of the late Duke Guglielmo, and news of the invasion of Austria by the Ottoman Turk. It is to the credit of Duke Vincenzo that he went himself (July 31, 1594), with fourteen hundred horse, to help the Emperor; and yet again in 1597, when his kinsman Carlo Gonzaga, Duke of Nevers, was

¹ Born in 1542, Scipione Gonzaga gained the Cardinalate in 1587; he was founder of the Accademia degli Etereî.

badly wounded in leading his French troops ¹ against the Turks, who threatened Buda-Pest. In 1599 Don Ferrante Gonzaga had been made by the Emperor Governor of Upper Hungary ; and yet again in July 1601, the war still continuing, Duke Vincenzo went to help, with Carlo Rossi as his Captain, and took his part, we are told, in the fighting, exposing himself in the front rank.

The trouble, periodical at Mantua, with the Jews reappeared in 1602, when a certain Franciscan monk, Padre Bartolommeo Cambi, preached against them in the Duomo, the Duke being present, and advised their being kept in their own Ghetto. The Jews, exasperated at this, were said to have made jest of it in their synagogue ; the Bishop referred the matter to the Duke, who hanged seven of them, sending their families and descendants into perpetual exile ; but “ even after this,” we are told, “ the trouble continued.” At this time (1603) Duke Vincenzo, being in poor health, had constructed for his pleasure a palace on Lago di Garda, using as his architect the famous Antonio Maria Viani of Cremona both here, at Marmirolo and in the Appartamento di Corte—making this last yet more splendid, and adding the passage to S. Barbara and the theatre. Viani, too, was the architect of the new theatre, which was used for the representation of Guarini’s dramatic work on the occasion of the marriage of Prince Francesco, eldest son of the Duke, with the Infanta Margherita of Savoy, daughter of Duke Carlo Emanuele. When the Prince and his bride returned from Turin to Mantua (May 29, 1608) they had a great reception, and a mock naval conflict was given upon the lakes.

The death of his wife, Duchess Eleonora de’ Medici, from apoplexy in 1611 was evidently a blow to the Duke. She was buried in the crypt of S. Andrea ; and the Duke, himself suffering from catarrh, died also (February 8, 1612) and was buried beside her. A popular ruler, a prince of great spirit, and loved by his subjects ; but blamed by the more thoughtful for his extravagant expenditure (he is said to have spent more than 20,000,000 scudi), his passion for the theatre and for actors and singing-women, and for his too free life (*lascivi*

¹ Carlo de Nevers was son of Lodovico, the brother of Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga ; Don Ferrante belonged to the Gonzaga line of Guastalla.

dissipazioni), which affected his health, and took him away in the flower of his age. Prince Francesco, his first-born, had been already associated with him in the government ; and, on June 10 of this year, after his father's funeral in S. Andrea, took over the government, with the title of fifth Duke of Mantua and third of Monferrato. Among his first public acts was the restoration of the great clock in the Piazza, of which the Mantuans were immensely proud ; so that Gionta even records it as a calamity, a warning of coming ill, when one year the works went wrong and it stopped.

And now already a sense of disaster seems to brood over the brilliant and successful dynasty. We may remember that the House of Este at Ferrara was already extinct in the male line, and had been annexed to the States of the Church by Clement VIII in 1598 ; so that Mantua was now alone left out of the brilliant galaxy of independent Italian States in Northern Italy. This fact is of capital importance in the sequence of Mantuan history, for, with her two rich Duchies of Mantua and Monferrato, and with the world-famed treasures of her palaces, she was already eyed hungrily both by Spain and Austria. With the death of Duke Vincenzo, following close upon that of the Duchess Eleonora, the elements of danger begin already to appear. Prince Francesco had indeed—as we have seen—duly succeeded to his father, in June of 1612, in the Dukedoms of Mantua and Monferrato ; but meanwhile small-pox broke out, and in December of this year of his accession, his little son, the Principino Lodovico, was taken ill, and died that month—"in spite of all remedies." Only the month before the young Duke had lost a close relative, Don Silvio Gonzaga, natural son of his father Duke Vincenzo, to whom he was much attached and had given the title of Marchese di Cavriana ; and now, overwhelmed at the loss of his infant son, and most probably himself contracting the same fell disease, in that very same year, on the 22nd of December, Duke Francesco, "while he was giving great hopes of becoming an excellent prince," died, after only ten months of rule, at the early age of twenty-seven.

A fatality, a sort of Nemesis (and there were dark deeds enough to answer for) seems to creep closer daily to the old

dynasty—to the city herself ; we seem at this moment of her story to be entering upon the last act of a terrible drama. For upon the horizon of the future appears, as if before our very eyes, a grinning spectre, who is very soon to fill the Chancelleries of Europe with piles of diplomatic missives, of dusty documents ; to plunge her great nations into the horrors of a general war ; to reach Mantua herself, with the sword, the plague and famine following close behind ; to scatter her treasures of art, to despoil her riches, to make the famous old city a place of utter desolation—and to plunge her great House of Gonzaga into final and irretrievable ruin. The name of this mocking phantom, who will henceforth haunt the pages of our story, is known to history as the Mantuan Succession.

CHAPTER XI

THE MANTUAN SUCCESSION

AT this point my story assumes such extraordinary dramatic interest that, to follow its threads, we have at first to consider the characters who now enter upon the scene ; and next, the wider world-forces which were working behind, and of which—unable to really control them—they often become the merest puppets. In the conclusion of the last chapter we saw the sudden and unlooked-for extinction of the direct line in the almost simultaneous death of Duke Francesco and his infant son. But there remained his two brothers Fernando and Vincenzo, and his daughter Maria, born 1609, who was two years older than little Prince Lodovico who had just died. This baby girl became immediately, through the tragic end of her father and little brother, a figure of first importance in the history not only of Mantua, but of Europe—became, in fact, as has been said,¹ “ the centre of all the schemes, the object of all the intrigues, the apple, at the same time, of beauty and of discord ” ; and this for the reason that Monferrato, which had come to the Gonzaga through marriage with the heiress of the Palaeologi, as a feud in the female line (*feudo femminile*) would be considered to pass incontestably to the infant daughter of the late Duke.

None held this opinion more strongly than Duke Carlo Emanuele of Savoy, whose princes, for more than three generations, had cast envious eyes on this most tempting and neighbouring Duchy of Monferrato. We have just seen with what splendour and rejoicing had been celebrated the wedding of his daughter, the Infanta Margherita, with Prince Francesco

¹ See *Mantua and Monferrato, 1624-1627*, by Romolo Quazza; Pubblicazione della R. Accademia Virgiliana, Mantova, 1922.

Gonzaga. Now she remained a widow, and her own presence, and still more that of her daughter, were coveted by neighbouring princes; by her father Duke Carlo Emanuele; by the Governor of Milan, who, in the name of Spain, claimed to have the little Princess Maria in his charge—by none, however, more than Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga, who, on the news of his brother's death, had posted back from Rome to Mantua, where he had arrived incognito on March 3 of 1613. He at once assumed control of the Government, and visited the widowed Duchess, "treating her with every distinction"; but kept her at Mantua on the plea that she might be *enceinte* from her late marriage, and refused to accept any commands as to the disposition of her little daughter Maria, save from the Emperor himself. Finally, however, it became impossible to keep the Duchess Margherita any longer on the plea above mentioned; and she was sent back, alone, to her father at Turin. Furious at this treatment, the Duke of Savoy fell upon Monferrato, seized the cities of Trino, Alba and Moncalvo, but was driven back from Nice by the Governor of Milan; while Carlo Gonzaga, Duc de Nevers, came to help with the French troops, meeting at Casale Prince Vincenzo with his Mantuans; and Cardinal Ferdinando himself sent protests to "all the Courts of Europe."

For behind this tangled issue of the Mantuan and Monferrato Succession there were working the same forces whose conflict has already filled our story; which had blotted out the Renaissance of art and thought in seas of blood; had strangled Italian liberty, and threatened—in the old days of Isabella—the existence of Mantua herself. The French Monarchy, driven back for a time across the Alps, was now seeking to recover its old position, and once more to dominate Italy; while Spain, grown feebler, still held tenaciously to the Duchy of Milan, and looked with jealousy upon any intruder; and the Austrian Emperor, yet named as the Cæsarean Majesty, claimed to the full his old suzerainty over the Mantuan Duchy. It needed but a spark, such as this angry onset of Savoy, to set all these elements of conflict into a blaze.

Meanwhile Ferdinando, having obtained from the Emperor (October, 1613) his investiture as Duke of Mantua and Mon-

ferrato, with the fiefs thereto appertaining, decided to give up the ecclesiastical dress, and renounce his Cardinal's hat, yet keeping the title of Highness (*Altezza*), and reserving for later that of Duke. For the moment the trouble with Savoy had been composed by the King of France, in a treaty of July 21, 1615; but the Duke of Savoy would not be the first to disarm, nor would the Gonzaga subscribe to the conditions; the Spanish troops kept increasing, and preparations for war continued—Monferrato with its succession still remaining an open sore. At Rome Ferdinando was seeking to have the Cardinalate, renounced by himself, now transferred to his younger brother Vincenzo; and by constant pressure got him added to the Consistory. Then he decided on his own coronation, which took place on January 6, 1616. After solemn Mass held in the Cathedral, he was proclaimed, amid the firing of guns, the ringing of bells and acclamation of those present, as sixth Duke of Mantua and fourth of Monferrato. His friends were rewarded, money given to the people and to pious foundations, and March 4 proclaimed a festival in honour of the finding of the Most Precious Blood; nor were the industries of Mantua neglected, for we hear of a refinery of wax candles now started and a "fabbrica" of majolica. At the same time—with the cloud of war growing ever darker over the Monferrato frontiers, where Savoy, Spain and France were arming for battle, with no revenues coming in from that rich province, but only war expenses, and with the succession still unsettled—the need of prudent government and close economy was never more pressing; and it was at this very time, as if impelled by some fatal power for evil, that the selfish and criminal folly of the Gonzaga themselves precipitated the ruin of their House.

Prince Vincenzo Gonzaga had now become Cardinal in his brother's place, but soon had tired of his ecclesiastical career and its duties, and retired to his castle of Gazzuolo, giving himself up to a life of amusement. It must have been at this time, to his undoing, that he met a lady of his own House, Donna Isabella Gonzaga di Novellara, who had married Ferrante, Prince of Bozzolo. Left (in 1605) a widow, and the mother of seven sons, at the age of forty she was still possessed

of great charm and dignity of manner—a certain “*venusta dignitosa*”—combined with high qualities of mind and spirit. Vincenzo fell madly in love with her; and, carried away by this passion, against the counsel of his friends, and even of the lady herself—who was many years his senior—he married her secretly at the end of August 1616, without waiting to obtain the approval of his brother the Duke, nor yet that of the Highest Pontiff. But he very soon repented his rash step; and probably the pressure of his friends and of the Duke added to his regrets. He now sought, with no less haste, to free himself from this ill-advised marriage, through his own influence and that of his family at Rome: but Isabella was a great lady—herself a Princess of Casa Gonzaga—and the matter was not thus to be lightly ended. To obtain his end, we are told, the Gonzaga had no shame of making abuse of the power of Monarchs, of Cardinals, and high dignitaries of the Church, and in spreading calumnies against the lady herself. But in vain did even King Louis XIII of France and his mother, the Regent Maria de’ Medici, and the Cardinals Ludovisi and Borghese seek to persuade the Pope to annul the marriage, on the ground that Isabella, at her age, could not hope for further issue, and the House of Gonzaga ran the risk of being extinguished from “lack of descendants”; in vain did the King of Spain, for his own political ends, support these demands of Duke Ferdinando and his brother. The divorce case threatened to become interminable, a scandal to all Italy, and entangled already with this question of the Mantuan Succession. Amid the delays of the Roman Court of Rota, amid the dusty piles of legal parchment we seem to see that Spectre—daring now to show himself in the open, to jibe and mock at Prince Vincenzo, furious at being cut off by his own folly from the hope of legitimate issue.

But what of the lady herself—a Princess of high rank and character, of independent position, who now found herself exposed to a campaign of calumny, and being driven by backstairs intrigues out of her rights as a wife? Finding all this going on, and the “*processo*” already opened at the Holy Office, she took a bold step—deciding to go herself to Rome, and of her own free will surrender to be imprisoned in Castel

S. Angelo ; only demanding that the witnesses against her should be compelled to do the same, and make their depositions in her presence. The Pope could not refuse this just demand ; and, in spite of Duke Ferdinando's opposition, issued his formal intimation to appear at Rome to the complainant and his witnesses. Upon the examination of the judges the fact could not be concealed that the evidence had been worked up ; placed before the accused, the witnesses could not support their own affirmations ; and eventually Isabella—who had been helped throughout her imprisonment, both with counsel and money, by such prospective claimants to the Mantuan or Monferrato succession as the Duke of Savoy, and probably also the Gonzaga Duc de Nevers—came out of the Castello almost in triumph, with her marriage proclaimed as valid.

This, however belongs to a later date ; and for the present the “ processo ” was dragging on in the Courts of Rome—an unending source of expense and intrigue, covering the once great name of Gonzaga with all the mud of Europe. All this was bad enough : but with this flagrant example of folly before his very eyes, Duke Ferdinando now even surpassed his brother in completing, by his own criminal selfishness and cruelty, the ruin of their family.

Among the maids of honour (*damigelle*) of Duchess Margherita of Savoy was Camilla, daughter of Count Ardizzino Faà of Monferrato, who had been a Minister of the Gonzaga in Piedmont. The girl was yet young—only fifteen years of age—of exceptional beauty, and of good character ; and when the Duchess Margherita returned to Turin she had remained at the Mantuan Court, residing within the Corte under the care of her father Count Ardizzino, who loved her devotedly. We seem to see her on that fatal morning, early in the year 1615, singing in the gladness of her heart within the old Reggia to the music of her lute (*citra*), when this innocent child fell under the notice of Duke Ferdinando. His passion was awakened—was ardent and insistent. Count Ottavio Valenti, who had sought her as his wife, got a speedy hint that he had better look elsewhere. The girl herself was frightened—full of blushes, of shame. “ Then, taking courage,

she did not neglect to set before her Ducal lover the difference of their positions, and the many regrets to which his passion for her might succeed ; and, finding him disposed to violence, showed clearly that she would sooner die than help her own disgrace." The Duke, finding that his efforts to get her—even under promise of subsequent marriage—were unavailing, determined at last to marry her, with the consent of her father, Count Ardizzino.

" It was about the middle of October (1616) that the Duke called her to his presence, and—after a thousand imprecations against himself if he broke faith, and in the presence of Monsignore Gregorio Carbonelli, Abbot of S. Barbara and Bishop of Diocesarea, and some other friends—in the inner chapel of the Court, he concluded the marriage, enjoining, however, close secrecy until there came better occasion of publishing it."¹ But in a Court like that of Mantua the matter could not be kept secret ; and the very attention and distinctions shown to Camilla soon awakened suspicion. The aunt of the Duke, Margherita Gonzaga, once Duchess of Ferrara, had now retired to the Convent of S. Ursula ; but kept within the convent walls her immense pride in her family, and close survey of its affairs.² The matter of Camilla coming to her ears, she at once interfered, treated the poor girl as a " vile thing " (*la tratto di vile*), and went so far even as to induce neighbouring sovereigns, such as Maria de' Medici, Queen of France, to use pressure upon Duke Ferdinando, with the threat of abandoning their favour. Perhaps the Duke's first fierce passion had already abated ; perhaps, too, he was in fear of these Courts, with whom we shall find him in constant correspondence. He certainly began to waver—to show himself cold to Camilla, to allow remarks to be spread abroad as to the invalidity of the marriage ; then, moved by her reproaches and despair, he won her back to confidence, and, finding himself ill, in the presence of several persons declared her to be his true wife.

The Duke was indeed, as we see from his correspondence

¹ *Vide Volta, op. cit.* (A.D. 1616).

² Margherita Gonzaga (b. 1564 ; d. 1618), daughter of Duke Guglielmo, was now widow of Alfonso d'Este, late Duke of Ferrara.

of this time, in the midst of political difficulties. A great family marriage, that of his sister Eleonora to the Emperor of Austria, came to strengthen his hands; but war had actually broken out between the Spaniards in Milan and the Duke of Savoy, with France behind him; Monferrato was overrun by their hostile troops, and the Duke, while trying to remain neutral, was distrusted and attacked by both the contending parties. To escape from his difficulties, he even thinks of exchanging Monferrato for Sardinia, for Cremona with the Cremonese territory, for the Abruzzi—for anywhere, in fact, to get it off his hands.¹ He writes imploring letters to the Most Christian King of France, and almost in the same tone and time, to the Most Catholic Monarch of Spain, expressing to both these opposing sovereigns his undying devotion, and desire for their appreciation of his merits to themselves—and his professions were obviously taken by both Monarchs at their face value.²

Harassed at the same time by the claims of France, Spain, Milan and Savoy, steering among all these reefs his tortuous and difficult course, Duke Ferdinando justly complains, in a confidential letter to Guiscard, his Chancellor of Monferrato (May 6, 1625), that "the neutral position of a small Prince between two Royal armies, who has not the means of defending himself, results in having them both for enemies; and that this is our own case is only too clear, for the French treat us, in fact, already as such; and we may expect the same from the Spaniards as soon as they are well armed." Hostilities had commenced in the Valtellina in November of 1624, and

¹ See the confidential letter of his agent at Madrid, Francesco Nerli, on the subject of the exchange (*baratto*) of Monferrato, under date of January 13, 1624.

² That to King Louis XIII begins: "Sire . . . I live under the protection of Your Majesty, and, as I have always professed to be your most devoted servant, so I should hope, from the magnanimity of Your Majesty towards me, those demonstrations of your most benign will of which I know nothing in my conduct to be undeserving" (Mantua, February 3, 1626). That to the King of Spain: ". . . Thus I humbly supplicate Your Majesty to accept my highest devotion, and to continue your most happy protection in all my affairs. Under such a shield it is my hope to enjoy the fruits of my devoted affection, and reverently bowing myself before Your Majesty," etc. (Mantua, May 30, 1625).

Ferdinando, foreseeing the storm, hurried to Casale to prepare its defence. An open declaration of war between France and Spain was not, however, at the moment probable ; but meanwhile Monferrato was overrun by the French, Nice and other strong places sacked with great cruelty, and the Spaniards, on their side, soon adopted the same methods ; while the wretched inhabitants were ill-used even by the troops of the Gonzaga, who should have been their defenders.

Even before all this, it had probably presented itself to the subtle intelligence of Ferdinando—or been suggested by his friends and relations—that a brilliant political marriage might strengthen his position. The claims of the unhappy Camilla, in the light of these new plans, were forgotten ; her father, her sole protector, Count Ardizzino, had lately died—“ not without suspicion of poison ” ; and the poor girl, finding herself abandoned, went to live at Casale, where, in 1616, she gave birth to a male child, to whom she gave the name of Giacinto. After much deliberation and hesitation, Duke Ferdinando had selected Caterina de’ Medici, sister of Cosimo II, Grand Duke of Tuscany, as his future bride ; and by this dastardly act—for such it was, if the account I have just given from a very careful chronicler is correct—had sealed his own doom and that of his country, as well as of his child and the woman he had betrayed. But this matter of Camilla Faà was too notorious to be overlooked. The Grand Duke, before he would allow his sister’s marriage, demanded the possession of the written autograph in which Ferdinando had declared his union with Camilla as binding ; and now, to obtain this document, “ this innocent girl was exposed to further persecution.” “ But no promises, menaces, nor deceit would make her give up that document ”—which was her sole remaining claim to justice for herself and her child ; and the Duke, to gain his end, was reduced to writing another like it, which he passed off successfully on his Medici brother-in-law.

After the new marriage Camilla was brought back, under strong guard, to Mantua, and shut up in the Monastery of Carmelino : then it was found—and leaked out—that she had always preserved in her possession this writing of

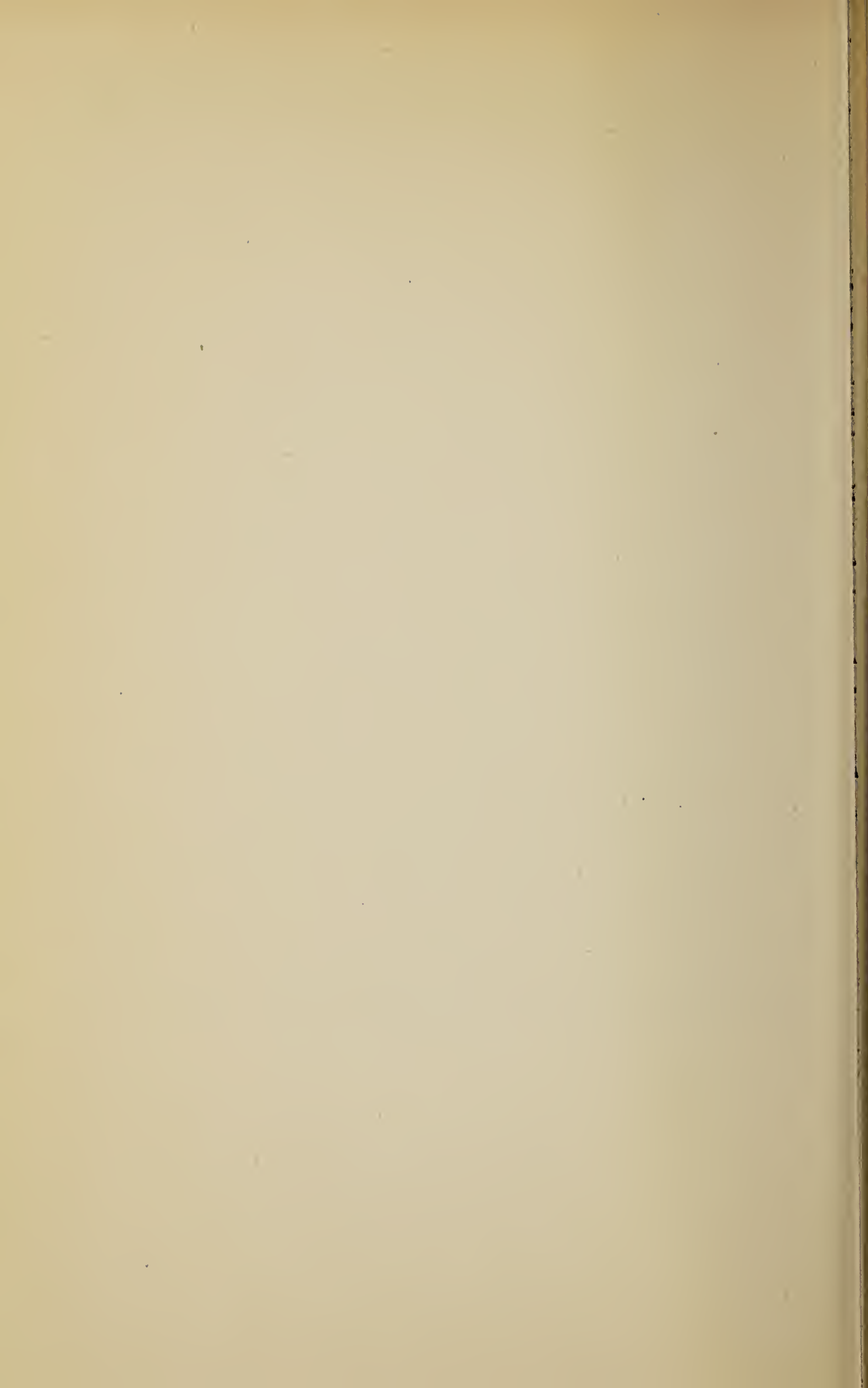
Ferdinando, with other letters, in which he declared himself as her husband. The Grand Duke was deeply offended ; and before his reproaches Ferdinando recognized at last the danger he was in, unless he could find a prompt remedy. Camilla was again enjoined to give up the papers ; and, when she still firmly refused, they were torn from her by main force, under the threat of killing her son. After that she was ordered to marry another man, or to enter some religious order. “ The unhappy woman (*infelice*) refused the first suggestion, because her conscience would not allow it ; nor would she become a nun, because she must then abandon her son.” But to save him she had to make the sacrifice ; and at last entered the Monastery of Corpus Domini in Ferrara, where she lived for forty years, resigned to her sufferings and always full of pity and compassion for Ferdinando.

This latter had soon need of that pity : for never had man been caught more closely in his own snare, himself making his own hell upon earth, than that cruel and selfish, but most unhappy, ruler. The boy Giacinto remained at Court, well guarded from the jealousy of the Duchess, and grew up into a lad of good parts, handsome, intelligent, of whom a father might be proud ; but cut off from the succession by his father’s own act—for to acknowledge him now would have been to invalidate the later marriage, and inflict a deadly insult upon the powerful Duke of Tuscany—always exposed to the hostility of the Duchess and her adherents, as well as of those Princes who were greedily watching for the vacant Mantuan Succession ; even his young life not too safe, for poison was by no means unknown in these Italian Courts of the seventeenth century. Meanwhile Duke Ferdinando, his father, was paying dearly enough for his betrayal. He found himself, we are told, not only exposed to the jealousy and constant reproaches of his Duchess, whose union had proved childless, and the suspicions of the Grand Duke her brother, who watched his every movement ; but tortured, without any doubt, by continual remorse for an action which was to make within his own lifetime this Mantuan Succession a ghastly problem to all Europe, which finally affected his mind and health, and almost certainly shortened his days. Romolo Quazza, whose study is mainly



INNOCENCE WASHING HER HANDS

FROM THE PAINTING BY GIULIO ROMANO IN HALL OF THE MIRRORS, REGGIA OF THE GONZAGA



documental (and here we have seen that documents had been intentionally destroyed), has to add very gravely of this Duke : “ nor can we doubt that his love for Camilla Faà was far other than a mere passing caprice ; and that the abandonment of that unhappy woman, which cast such a shadow over the life of Ferdinando, was the real source of the profound grief and biting remorse which henceforth were his constant companions, and, as we are told by contemporary chroniclers, undermined his life and hastened its end.” ¹

Such was the man's inner life ; for, of course, on the outside there was the grand State life, the wedding at Florence (February 1616) with the Medici Princess—“ the difficulties being overcome ”—held with great rejoicings, and the triumphant return (March 8) into Mantua. Then all the cares of State and interests of diplomacy ; among others, a very pressing question being that of Scipione Gonzaga, Prince of Bozzolo, who, resenting bitterly his sister's treatment by Prince Vincenzo, “ had fallen into the hatred of Ferdinando ; so that Scipione, having placed some mills on the Oglio, whose waters belonged to Mantua, the Duke sent troops to attack him, and Scipione had to escape to Milan.” The matter was arranged at last ; but the Prince of Bozzolo only waited his moment of revenge.

In 1618 had died Margherita Gonzaga, daughter of the Duke Guglielmo, and widow of Alfonso, Duke of Ferrara, the bitter and successful enemy, as we have seen, of poor Camilla. “ A woman of spirit and alert intelligence,” says the chronicler, “ she did not lack profound policy, nor the knowledge of the inclination of sovereigns, knowing how to draw therefrom to her own advantage—and would have given her life to preserve the dignity of Casa Gonzaga, and excelled in the works of religion.” These words paint her character to the life, but fail to give the impress of human charity : to the pride of her House and its assumed interests she had sacrificed, without hesitation and mercy, another woman's life and happiness. Her funeral was held in state in S. Barbara ; but she was buried within S. Ursula, the convent which she had founded. In the same year came the good news that the turbulent Duke of Savoy

¹ *Vide* Romolo Quazza, *Mantova e Monferrato* (1624-1627), ch. iii.

had restored to Duke Ferdinando his lands in Monferrato. At this time the Mantuan forces consisted of twelve thousand five hundred infantry and fifteen hundred cavalry ; and a sham fight was held (1619) without Porta Pusterla, when a cannon exploded with fatal results.

The year 1621 saw two events of first importance—one being that the Gonzaga branch of Guastalla, whose story we have traced, was raised by the Emperor to the rank of Dukedom, in reward for the services of Don Ferrante II. There may have been more behind this move ; for (as we shall see later in this chapter) the Emperor, finding the Mantuan Succession likely to fail in the direct line, being naturally opposed to the entry of Carlo Gonzaga, Duc de Nevers—who was really a French noble, and might easily make Mantua a valuable outpost in Italy for the growing power of France—began to turn his attention to this still vigorous Gonzaga branch of Guastalla ; and later threw his influence entirely in that direction. But for the moment this was overshadowed by a yet greater honour which came to Casa Gonzaga, in the marriage of the Emperor Ferdinand himself with Eleonora Gonzaga, sister to Duke Ferdinando and Prince Vincenzo. We can imagine what high festival was held in the Mantuan Court on this occasion. Leaving Mantua, the future Empress was escorted (1622) to the Veronese frontier by the Duchess, Prince Vincenzo and “ a band of knights and ladies, who set her on her way through Bressanone to Vienna.”

But neither this brilliant marriage, which brought him close to the Emperor himself, nor the splendid Court festivals, nor diplomatic success, could bring peace to Duke Ferdinando. Black care—an unwelcome guest—and sad thoughts sat ever close behind his throne within the Reggia. Fear of the plague had brought him back there (April 1625) from Chioggia, with the Prince of Guastalla as his companion ; and strict measures were taken to prevent the entry into Mantua of infected persons and merchandise. “ Notwithstanding,” says the chronicler, “ the incessant cares of State of our Duke, remorse never left his conscience : indeed, his sadness increased, remembering the unhappiness he had caused to the ill-fated Camilla and the near extinction of the Ducal line through lack of heirs.”

From all these troubled thoughts he became so morose, so wretched (*fastidioso ed afflitto*), that no pastime helped him, and he began to decline seriously in health : what more than all else oppressed him was the unjust exclusion of his son Giacinto, born him by Donna Faà, who in his boyhood, besides charm of manner, had developed marvellously in spirit and mind. “ Always occupied with these thoughts and many confused plans, at last, from a sense of duty, he resolved to use every force to support this, his only offspring : driven to this by the fear that his brother Don Vincenzo—without children by Donna Isabella, now fifty years of age—might bring in some illegitimate son ; again by the danger of the ruin of Mantua if the Dukedom came under the Gonzaga of Nevers, too closely bound to France, and by the pretensions of Savoy to Monferrato. It seemed easy to him, through his sister the Empress, to obtain the Emperor’s consent to choose as successor Don Giacinto, supposed then to be illegitimate—for this concession had been made to his ancestors.” ¹

But he found his plans blocked on every side—by his brother Vincenzo, whom he could not bring over ; by the House of Nevers, and by France ; by the other Gonzaga of Castiglione, Bozzolo and Guastalla ; by Savoy, who would yield none of its pretensions ; by the suspicions of the Duchess, naturally jealous and distrustful, and the resentment of the Grand Duke, if there were a shadow of validity given to the earlier marriage. Already he was in terror for the life of Don Giacinto, who was ill-seen by the Duchess, and closely watched by the agents at his Court of Carlo de Nevers. “ He therefore wrote to the two Monarchs ” (of Austria and France) “ imploring their help ; but added to France that, if Don Giacinto were excluded, it would be well that the Prince of Rethel, son of the Duc de Nevers, should come to Mantua, accustom himself to Italy, and consider marriage with the Princess Maria as the only means (*unico espediente*) of preserving Monferrato.”

Duke Ferdinando did not need to repeat this invitation :

¹ *Vide Volta, op. cit.* It may be recalled that Francesco Gonzaga, when created by the Emperor Wenceslaus first Marquis of Mantua (*vide* Chapter IV.), obtained the right of declaring as heirs his illegitimate sons, if legitimate issue failed. This right, confirmed (1404) by Pope Boniface, had never been used.

it was the very chance that King Louis XIII of France and his protégé were waiting for. "It is easy to imagine," says Quazza, "what a response the Duc de Nevers made to the invitation sent from Mantua; it responded to his most intimate wishes, to his long-cherished aspirations."¹ The Duc de Rethel left Charleville without delay, and arrived in Mantua in late December (1625), where he was received by Ferdinando and Vincenzo, and given a suite of apartments in the Reggia, such as befitted a presumptive heir to the State. The claim of Don Giacinto to the succession was blocked; and the fatal step taken which was to end in the ruin and sack of Mantua. But there was no sign of the storm as yet, for in the year following (1626) Leopold, Archduke of Austria and brother to the Emperor, proposed marriage with the sister of the Duchess; and yet again there were three days of pageant and festival.

Later in the same year, Duke Ferdinando, who had for some time been in bad health, fell seriously ill; and having by his will (October 1) left no little real estate (*stabili*) in favour of Don Giacinto, and declared his brother Vincenzo as his universal heir, he died on the night of October 29, and was buried with great splendour in the subterranean Church of S. Barbara. That he had great natural gifts, that he possessed industry, culture, political insight, is evident from his unceasing correspondence, which often reveals the strangest contrasts of character—"bigoted asceticism, busied in unearthing relics of Saints, a morbid passion for comedians, musicians, dwarfs, buffoons; unmeasured personal extravagance in dress and the smallest details in the adornment of his apartment."² He always seems to me to have preserved something of the priest, but on abandoning his Cardinalate for the Ducal throne had at once surrounded himself with artists and comedians. The "cantante" Adriana Basile saw the "golden age" of Vincenzo I, who had spent so lavishly on the theatre, about to return. The first to take the road to Mantua was that fine painter, Domenico Feti, whose merits are now again becoming recognized. Saraceni was

¹ *Vide* Romolo Quazza, *op. cit.* ch. iii.

² *Vide* A. Luzio, *La Galleria dei Gonzaga*, ch. ii.

charged to repair the decorations of his gallery. Sebregondi was the architect chosen for his new palace of Favorita, which, though ruined, still exists ; and the scholars of Guido Reni (since the Master himself was not accessible), with Francesco Albano, that charming "Anacreon of painting," were employed on its adornment. The Mantuan Court became crowded with artists—among them the young Van Dyck, then following the footsteps of his Master, Rubens. A gallery of painting was being formed by Duke Ferdinando, who, in 1625, endowed Mantua with a University under the influence of the Jesuits ; while on his marriage festival with Caterina de' Medici—which was to bring him no real happiness—immense sums had been spent.

All this meant lavish outlay ; and the resources of the State—with Mantuan trade declining, with Monferrato invaded and ravaged—were not in a condition to bear the strain. Ferdinando found himself, at last, with Court officials and creditors clamouring for payment, reduced to every device to raise money ; to pledge the wonderful Mantuan jewels ; to forced loans, and fresh taxes from his subjects on rice and fish—even to consider, at last, the question of selling some part of the paintings in the Ducal collection, as a letter from the dealer Nys to Lord Dorchester seems at least to suggest. His health was then already breaking down ; and he has left us a strange and terrible pen-picture of his last illness but one. There is, to my mind, perhaps no sadder spectacle in all history, no more terrible moral lesson than that afforded by this man—prematurely old, haunted by regrets and remorse by his past wrong-doing, but entangled now inextricably in the net woven around him by his own selfish cruelty and folly. He had flung aside the lovely girl, the mother of his child, and driven her into a broken life within convent walls. He had disinherited the fair young Prince who was growing up within his Court, and might have solved that ghastly problem of the Mantuan Succession. He had left the straight path, which might have saved both him and his country, to lose himself in the quagmires of family interest and diplomatic advantage. Before such a life's end it would be easy to moralize : but I will say only this. In these terrible issues of life—which

may happen to any one of us—these problems in which duty, interest, the attraction of sex, claims of family, and present or future advantage seem hopelessly involved, there is only one clear course—and I speak with the experience of life, in the thought that these words may reach some day some one who is in the same deadly peril—and that is the straight course, the path of what we know as duty. That path, that course, I would define more precisely as remembering—and it is no easy task amid the intense, the overpowering appeals of passion and interest—what effect our action may have upon the life and happiness of others ; what claims they have on us which must be answered ; what the results on their future, no less than on ourselves, of our decision.

There remained Prince Vincenzo, last of the direct Ducal line of Casa Gonzaga, his brother's legitimate and universal heir, who now took over the government as seventh Duke of Mantua and fifth of Monferrato. To gain his subjects' affection he abolished several taxes—which seems but doubtful finance when money was badly needed ; and applied to the Emperor for his investiture, which was sent from Vienna on February 8, 1627. The French Court had gone into mourning for his brother, the late Duke ; the Duc de Nevers, with an eye to the future, sent a special envoy to convey both his condolences and congratulations on accession. The Duchess Caterina, after her husband's death, had shut herself up in the Convent of S. Ursula, in mourning for her loss, and six months later returned to Florence : “ loved for her goodness to the poor, she had never ceased her hatred for the unhappy Camilla and her jealousy of her husband.” ¹

But meanwhile the Mantuan Succession, which for the past ten years had haunted all the Chancelleries of Europe, within the fated city itself had become an obsession, a ghastly nightmare. The whole picture of its Court at this time is so strange, so fantastic; that it seems almost incredible. Only the life of Duke Vincenzo II—a life still young, but undermined perhaps

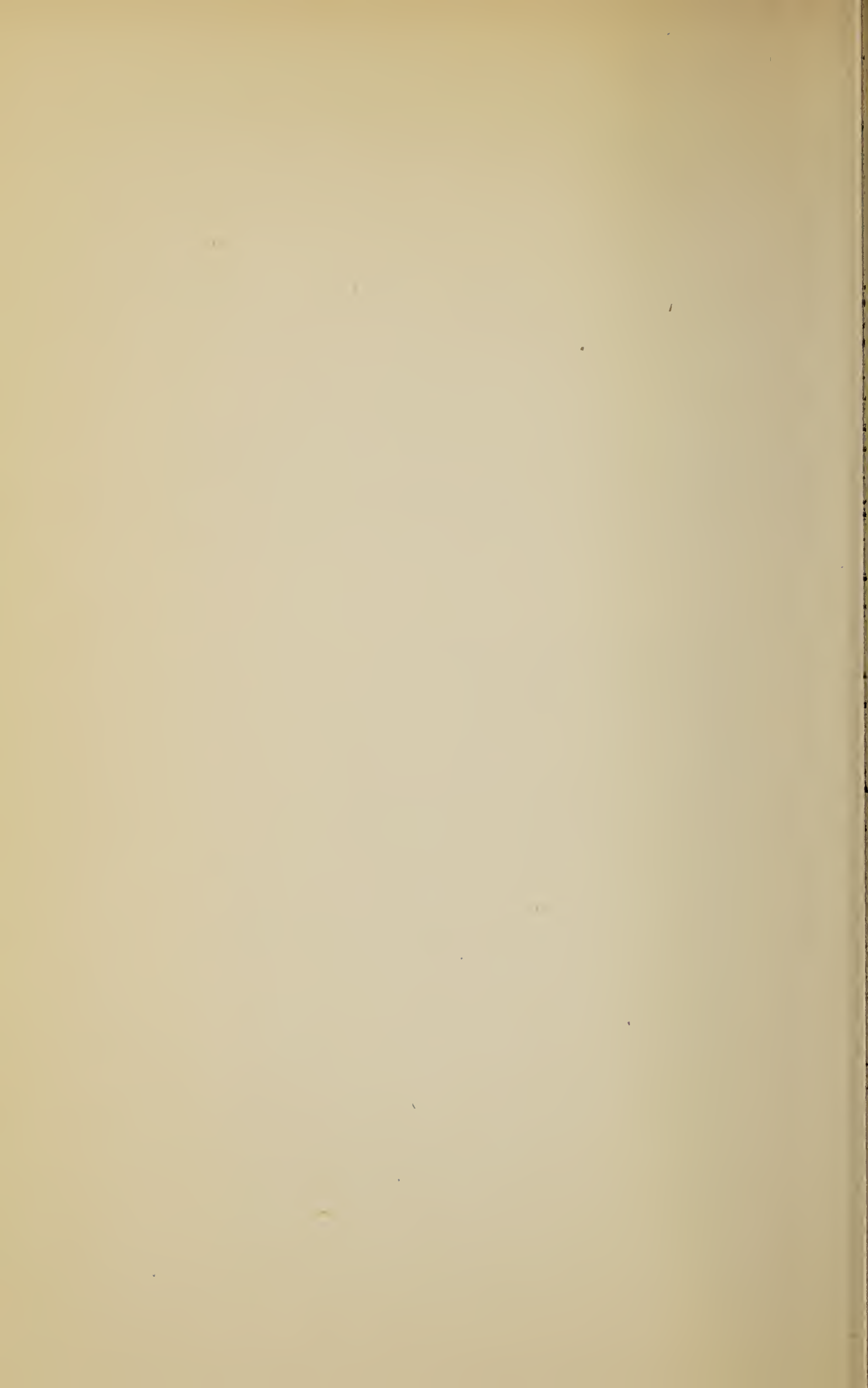
¹ Cf. Volta, *op. cit.* But we are told by Romola Quazza that Duchess Caterina de' Medici wrote to Vincenzo from Florence (under date of July 6, 1627) “ recommending to him Don Giacinto, in execution of the wishes of her late husband.” It seems as if her conscience had awakened ; but it was too late by then to save the victims of her jealousy.



CAVALLERIZZA
WITH TOWER OF S. BARBARA BEHIND



DETAIL OF THE CAVALLERIZZA
BY GIULIO ROMANO IN THE REGGIA OF THE GONZAG



through heredity, as well as by earlier excesses—stood between the old order and chaos ; and around there surged a tormented sea of intrigue, the envoys of France, Spain, Austria and Savoy, of the Gonzaga Duc de Nevers and of the Gonzaga Duke of Guastalla, both claimants to the inheritance, all watching that frail life—and this to his own knowledge—of the new Duke with greedy eyes and covetous desire.

All this time we must remember that Princess Maria Gonzaga, the little daughter of Duke Francesco, the direct heiress of Monferrato, had been growing up within the convent walls of S. Ursula, near Mantua, into beautiful and charming girlhood. It was from S. Ursula, as we have seen, that Margherita Gonzaga, Duchess of Ferrara, had directed her first and fatal attack upon the unhappy Camilla ; it was to S. Ursula that Caterina de' Medici had retired in the first months of her widowhood ; and though Margherita, widow of Duke Francesco, had been sent back to Turin, she naturally remained in constant correspondence with her daughter Maria. All these women were inter-related, both among themselves and with the great sovereigns of Europe—with Eleonora, Empress of Austria, with Maria de' Medici, Queen of France, whose influence the Duchess of Ferrara had even used against Camilla. They were all interested in the Succession as a family matter ; all corresponding, all intriguing, pulling the strings in favour of their own special candidates ; and the key of the whole situation lay in this innocent and beautiful child, who held in her own person the rich inheritance of Monferrato.

Duke Vincenzo, as we have seen, had lost his action for divorce. All the money spent, all the mud stirred up, the scandalous methods employed had failed him ; and Princess Isabella had come forth—"almost in triumph"—from Castel S. Angelo. What those methods had been might seem to our time almost incredible. Vincenzo had appealed to the Pope on the ground that he had been the victim of a sorceress ; how else, he explained, could he, a Cardinal of Holy Church, have forgotten the duties of his office and plunged into such a union ? There is even strong suspicion that he was behind a plot to poison Isabella in her lodgings at Rome ; and Duke

Ferdinando, though holding him back from this crime, had pressed the Pope that the assumed sorceress should be put to the torture . . . as the only means of discovering her Satanic wickedness.¹ Nor can we assume that it was entirely the justice of her cause which had saved Isabella. She had powerful friends behind her, who had an interest in blocking the Mantuan Succession. The Duke of Savoy gave her money and timely counsel ; as, probably from the same motives—though less directly—did Carlo Gonzaga, Duc de Nevers.

But now Duke Vincenzo saw a way out of his difficulties and those of the succession—this being himself to marry the charming young Princess Maria. He was still relatively a young man, and the girl probably would—and did, in fact, later—obediently accept any suitor who was approved by her father-confessor, her relations, and those who had her in charge. One obstacle only blocked the scheme—that being this accursed marriage, the result of his own folly ; and he recommenced anew his efforts to obtain freedom, using pressure on Pope Urban VIII, on the Court of Spain, on Maria's own mother, Margherita of Savoy, to gain his end. But his friends at Rome were lukewarm ; Isabella herself deeply pledged to the Houses of Savoy and Nevers ; and there were too many whose secret wishes were against his marriage. The failure of these plans may have seriously affected his health ; for “either from earlier inordinate pleasures, or that he could not get free from Isabella to unite himself with his niece Maria, who even pressed him (*anzi importunava*) to make her his Duchess,² and the lack of a legitimate heir . . . he fell into such low spirits that it made men doubt of his near end.”

“Then commenced the greatest confusion (*maggior scompiglio*) which can be imagined.” The terrible question of

¹ What that torture was may be seen from Corrado Ricci's remarkable study upon Beatrice Cenci, which has just been sent me from Rome by its author. Witnesses, like Antonelli, who had no share whatever in the crime, were stripped, put on the rack, and their arms deliberately dislocated ; while the pitiless judge, Moscato, muttered prayers—a “Miserere,” a “Credo”—to judge the time, which in one case lasted “*per tres partes unius horæ*.”

² Cf. Volta, *op. cit.* ; but this statement as to Maria seems open to question. She was obedient to her guardians, but her own fancy—so far as she had one at all—seems to have been the unfortunate and charming Don Giacinto.

the Succession becomes at this point a kind of devil's dance, in which all within the Court of Mantua were involved. The intrigues increased every instant ; and in the first days of September, while Vincenzo was at his villa of Maderno, there were rumours of a plot in favour of Giacinto.¹ It seems certain that the Courts of Madrid and Vienna, jealous of France and her protégé, the Duc de Nevers, favoured the claims of Giacinto ; and there was even talk of his legitimation and marriage with the Princess Maria. Finding the way blocked here—largely through the action, as we have seen, of his own father Ferdinando—they gave their support to the claims of the Gonzaga Duke of Guastalla. The Empress Eleonora wrote to her brother, Duke Vincenzo, in favour of the latter, whose plan seems to have been to become appointed Imperial Commissioner in the event of the Duke's death, which would have placed the armed forces of Mantua at his disposal, and made his way easy to the Dukedom. In the meantime he had a large sum of money ready for any emergency, and held a secret letter-patent from Spain debarring the House of Nevers from the succession. But he had a wily and untiring antagonist in the Duc de Nevers. "Carlo de Nevers," says Quazza, "was indeed never asleep." All through the rule of Duke Ferdinando his professions of affection to the House of Gonzaga, even to Don Giacinto and Don Federigo (natural son of Vincenzo II), had been unceasing. He had the powerful Monarchy of France behind him ; had the good luck—through Duke Ferdinando's own weakness—to see his son the Prince of Rethel established within the Mantuan Court as heir presumptive ; and now he played a trump card in discovering to Duke Vincenzo the whole of the schemes of his kinsman of Guastalla to secure the succession. Meanwhile, the Empress Eleonora was pressing the Duke to let Princess Maria be placed for safety under her care. There was a plot in hand to carry her off from the Convent of S. Ursula, and put her with the Duchess of Sabbioneta, aunt to Don Cesare of Guastalla. The Duke of Savoy sought to marry her to his own relative, the Cardinal di San Maurizio ; France was behind the Nevers party, Spain and Austria backing that of

¹ *Vide* Romolo Quazza, *Mantova e Monferrato*.

Guastalla ; and all these Courts had sent envoys or ambassadors extraordinary to Mantua to push their interests, to oppose those of their foes, while the lawyers and jurisconsults were themselves divided into two opposite factions.

Amid this devil's brew, this witch's caldron of lies, intrigues, and strife, one figure has emerged to my study as supremely significant. Through all the correspondence the name of Alessandro Striggi reappears : he is the necromancer, the arch-wizard, before whom the lesser spirits grow pale and falter. When Duke Vincenzo—pressed by creditors and courtiers for money, his famous family jewels already pledged and unable to be redeemed—thinks of disposing of the world-famed Gonzaga art collection, it is to Striggi that the whole business is confided. If Duke Ferdinando had thought of this expedient with some qualms of conscience, had refused even to think of parting with the Mantegna Cartoons, his brother had no such scruples ; and the dealer Daniel Nys was there at hand, ready to make an offer in cash down for his patron, the Stuart King of England. One thing alone seems to have troubled Vincenzo, that the sale, which was a discredit to his name, should not be known through Italy ; and this without doubt was one chief reason why England—rather than the Courts of Florence or Parma—was preferred. When Crestino—one of the few really honest servants who dared to speak plainly, to warn him of the disgrace to Casa Gonzaga—went to see him in his exquisite Villa of Maderno on Lago di Garda, the Duke was almost out of his mind at the thought that the hated Farnese might be behind, scheming to get the works of art out of the hands of Nys for their own collection. But that clever dealer was soon able to quiet his fears—to assure him from Murano that the paintings had already left the port—that the only question was that of the second contract, which would put into his hands the sculptures, the cameos, the “Triumphs” of Mantegna—would, in fact, complete the vile bargain. Then this Duke, the last of a great race—“in his nullity of thought, his premature decrepitude”—sinks back into the luxury of his fairy palace on Lake Garda, constructed at immense expense (it is said a hundred thousand golden scudi) by the great architect Viani for his father Duke

Vincenzo—to caress the jewels redeemed in part from Verona—to inhale the exquisite perfumes sent to him by Nys as a present from Venice—to speak to Crestino of a female dwarf of whom he is infatuated, whom he must have at any cost, even if his servants have to carry her off for him by force.¹

It had been Striggi who had transacted with Nys all the business of the sale, till he was hindered by gout in its last stages: it was Striggi who, when something of the matter leaked out, had come forward to say that the Reggia was still rich in canvases and marbles—though the best of the collection was already in the hands of the dealer Nys and his colleague Lanier; it was Count Striggi who for months had actually governed, who was called at Mantua not the “Vice-Duca” but “Arci-Duca,” and who had the threads of all the intrigues within his practised hands. He was accused of being in close correspondence with Don Cesare of Guastalla, and that the two were plotting with the Duke’s doctor against his life: written proofs of his treason were shown to the infuriated Duke, and Striggi was to be sent for next day and thrown out of the palace windows. The astute Minister did not attend Court that morning, giving out that he was ill; and before long he had cleared himself, and recovered all his old influence.

Then he suddenly changed round, and threw all that influence on the side of the Nevers faction. His letter to Carlo de Nevers (August 27, 1627) is significant of this new move: “The kindly reply with which Your Excellency honours my letters gives me a new obligation to render my thanks, as I do hereby with the present, in which I also assure you of my unshaken devotion in every time and on every occasion.” The Duc de Nevers replies with equally fervid thanks. “Never

¹ Cf. Luzio, *La Galleria dei Gonzaga*, ch. ii. “Letters of his courtiers depict him as entirely occupied with parrots and those dwarfs who were always a passion of the Gonzaghi, or craving strange medicines, which might achieve the miracle of bringing back vigour to his poor body in dissolution.” See also the letter from his ambassador at Madrid: “The Count Grand Chancellor, my uncle” (this was Striggi), “ordered me in Your Highness’ name to send as soon as possible four pounds of the finest Oriental pearls to be procured, to use as medicine for your person, and a selection of all the medicines last come from the Indies” (Madrid, July 25, 1626).

had he doubted of the kindly feeling of the Minister, even though voices had come to him of the contrary ; the Prince of Rethel and himself would always have recourse to his counsel."

That counsel and help were indeed timely, for things were coming rapidly to a crisis. The interminable divorce question dragged on at Rome, between hopes and fears ; but meanwhile, in the last days of November, Duke Vincenzo fell seriously ill. The arrival of the French Ambassador was, however, awaited at Mantua ; and in the meantime there was a move—apparently detected and expected by Striggi—to introduce arms and armed men within the Mantuan palace of Don Ferrante of Guastalla. As a counter-stroke, by the same powerful Minister's influence, Marquis Federigo ¹ was removed from his position as General of the Mantuan forces, and this important command transferred, by a letter patent (December 17) from the Duke himself, to the Prince of Rethel ; at the same time a most secret letter was sent through Striggi to Pope Urban VIII, begging for a dispensation for the latter's marriage with his cousin, the Princess Maria. On December 21 the Marquis de Saint Chaumont, Envoy of France, had arrived at Borgoforte, and was met there by the Prince de Rethel and lodged in the Castello ; but Duke Vincenzo was in no condition to give audience or transact business. In vain did the Ambassadors of Spain, Savoy, and Don Cesare Gonzaga himself try to get near him ; it is said that Saint-Chaumont at last reached his bedside, but even this has been questioned.

But now, on the eve of Christmas, had come the wished-for dispensation from Rome (under date of December 21), permitting the marriage of Maria with the Prince de Rethel ; and Striggi, the Grand Chancellor, who was evidently behind the whole business, decided on prompt action. That morning he had caused the oath of allegiance to be taken, in the event of Vincenzo's death, to Duke Carlo, and through him to the Duc de Rethel. He next advised the dying Gonzaga of the arrival of the Papal brief with the dispensation, obtained his consent

¹ Marquis Federigo Gonzaga, in command of the Mantuan army, was evidently distrusted by the Nevers party ; it was he, in fact, who earlier had accused Striggi of treason.

to the marriage, and opened up the matter to the Prince de Rethel, who up to that moment had been kept in ignorance of the proposed wedding ; then betook himself to the Convent of S. Ursula, and informed the Princess Maria of her uncle's wishes, giving her his assurance that—in spite of rumours to the contrary—the Duke was still alive. In the days preceding, by means of her Confessor, the girl's mind had been prepared for this step ; and now, assured of her uncle's wishes, of the Papal dispensation, of the fact that allegiance had been sworn to the Prince of Rethel, and that such a union would be welcomed by her subjects, she gave way, and permitted the marriage to take place. It has been stated that a false letter from her mother was placed before the young Princess to bring about her more willing consent ; this cannot be considered as certain, though her mother was certainly opposed to any such hurried marriage.¹

Late at night, at two o'clock (*le due di notte*) on that fatal Christmas Eve of 1627, the Prince de Rethel, Striggi and three others arrived in a closed carriage at the Bishop's Palace, and, showing him the brief, had brought him with them in the same coach to S. Ursula. Across the convent bars Princess Maria confirmed her consent given to the marriage. There were present, besides those mentioned, certain ladies and gentlemen of the Court—Contessa Flavia Guerrieri, the Duchess of Sabbioneta, Marquis Andriasi, Count Strozzi. By the light of torches they entered the Church of S. Ursula, the young Princess upon the arm of the Duc de Rethel.² Without delay the ceremony was completed by the Bishop. The Princess Maria and her husband drove with their suite to the Reggia, where in all haste an apartment was prepared for their use, which they entered—after a hurried supper, at

¹ Capilupi gives in full the false letter from Turin, under date of December 18 ; on the other hand, Quazza points to the authentic letter of December 23, in which the Infanta Margherita refused her consent, and opposed any hurried marriage for her daughter. This, however, does not prove that a forged letter was not used at this crisis.

² The Ambassadors of the different great nations, who were then in Mantua, were kept entirely in the dark as to this manœuvre ; it is even questioned whether Saint-Chaumont himself was in the secret. Striggi admits this in a letter of December 26, with the excuse—"every delay was harmful . . . but a thing once done is finished (*cosa fatta capo ha*)."

which the Duchess of Sabbioneta was present—at half-past four in the morning. The Bishop had, it is said, advised Duke Vincenzo of the marriage, and received his approval ; but he was then already a dying man, and four hours later he breathed his last.

He was “still in the fresh age of thirty years,” but his constitution—possibly from past excesses—was completely undermined. The last of his great race, he perished thus untimely, cut off in the flower of his life by a terrible disease,¹ leaving behind him a heritage of debt, confusion, and terror ; “and in such manner did the direct line of Gonzaga, which for three centuries had ruled with magnificence, become extinct.”

¹ Volta mentions dropsy and “*cancrena*” as the direct cause of Duke Vincenzo’s end, and makes the marriage to have taken place by the dying man’s bedside in the presence of Saint-Chaumont ; but the account here given, based on letters and documents, seems to be more correct, and is supported by Capilupi and Andreasi.

CHAPTER XII

THE SACK OF MANTUA

ON the morrow morning we are told that "throughout the city were known both the death of the Duke and the wedding of his successor, and there was sorrow and joy at the same time"; but, if the Mantuans themselves had received the news with mixed feelings, the reception of that news by the Great Powers—who from without were closely, even greedily, watching this failing inheritance—was in almost every case one of unqualified disapproval. It may have been hoped, indeed, by some of the parties directly concerned that the matter was now settled—"a finished thing" (*cosa fatta*), as Striggi himself had written that day to his friend Parma in Venice. On the contrary, it was this hurried and forced marriage which brought to a focus all the jealousies and rivalries of the Mantuan Succession; and, so far from securing peacefully that Succession, led directly to war, and to the terrible sack of the city. To call this marriage hurried and forced is, in fact, to describe it mildly, if it were—as asserted by contemporary writers—secured by means of a forged letter. "Since it was doubtful whether the Princess, a lady of good sense (*Signora prudente*)," says the Cronaca, "would agree to the marriage without the permission of her mother, the following letter was drawn up and forged (*fintamenta fatta*), as if it had come from Turin by express courier."¹ In any case it

¹ The letter, to which I have already alluded, is then given at length, beginning: "Figlia amatissima," and ending with these words: "Understanding that your marriage with the Duke of Rethel can restore quiet to the people of Mantua and Monferrato . . . it seems to me that I should be very thankful to all those who have been my subjects, and very cruel to Italy, if I did not yield my consent to this marriage, and even command and pray you, as your mother, to carry it out." (Signed) "Your loving mother, Margarita . . . In Turin, December 18, 1627."

seems a most questionable procedure to drag an innocent young girl from her convent bed, in the depth of night, to hurry her into a very dangerous and prearranged political alliance ; the chronicler just quoted stating " that the marriage had been consummated while Duke Vincenzo was even then breathing out his spirit." Blamed by her mother, the Infanta Margherita, who considered such a clandestine union " indecorous and unworthy of a great Princess," it was received with reprobation by the great Courts of Turin, Madrid, and Vienna. From Milan came the sudden news that the Spaniards were moving on the Mantovano with horse and foot ; in the meantime, when they heard in the morning of the last night's proceedings, the Ambassadors of Savoy and Milan expressed openly their indignation, and left their Court apartments to take lodgings in a public " locanda."

Amid all these troubles, most of what was still left of the great Mantuan collection seems to have followed the earlier consignment. If even Vincenzo II had some qualms of conscience in parting with the " Triumphs " of Mantegna, his successor, a newcomer to Mantua, had no such scruples ; and stood badly in need of ready cash to support his already tottering throne. That clever dealer, Nys, grasped the situation at once, and played his cards with consummate skill. Where before he had been pressing, now, secure of his booty, he assumes the cold and indifferent buyer, criticizes the famous cameos, promises, out of his own pocket, copies of the " Triumphs " and a present to the young Princess Maria. He thus secured the whole collection—the Cartoons of Mantegna, the cameos, the marbles, including the sculptured " Loves " of Praxiteles and Michelangelo—for 10,500 pounds sterling, and wrote in jubilation (February 29, 1627) to give the news to his patron in London.¹

¹ *Vide* A. F. Luzio, *La Galleria dei Gonzaga*, ch. iii. This " Sleeping Love " had been carved by Michelangelo when a young artist at Rome, and sold to Cardinal Riario as an antique ; it passed into the hands of the Duke of Urbino, and we may remember (*vide* Chapter VIII.) that, when his palace was looted by Cæsar Borgia, Isabella d'Este had secured it for her own collection. Years ago I saw and admired at Mantua, in the Museo Greco-Romano, and mentioned in my German work on that city, " a very lovely marble of Love Sleeping, his quiver at his side, with serpents entwined about his body " ; and

But—as often happens in life—the sharp man of business had overreached himself. To make sure of his wonderful bargain, and to get the goods safely away, Nys had undertaken to find the money himself. But his patron, Charles I of England, was himself upon no bed of roses ; his favourite, the Duke of Buckingham, had been murdered, the quarrel with his own Parliament was beginning, and the demand for £10,500, with transport expenses, came at a most unfortunate moment. The frantic appeals of Nys to England met with no response ; his drafts came back to him from Venice dishonoured ; in 1631, overwhelmed with debt, he is begging for a *moratorium* ; and, amid lamentations and incessant appeals, he at last disappears, with the rest of “the great Mantuan collection,” from our eyes into almost certain bankruptcy.

Our one consolation in this evil-smelling business is that the works of art then dispersed must have almost inevitably been looted, or perished outright, very soon after in the horrors of the Sack of Mantua : but when Charles Stuart met his end the Puritan victors had little sympathy for the creations of Italian genius—for Papistical paintings of the Virgin and her Child, or undraped subjects of Mythology. The collection, which might have been the nucleus of the finest in the world, was dispersed ; and the paintings have, in many cases, found a home in the galleries of the Louvre, the Prado, the Hermitage, the Imperial Museum at Vienna. Only the immortal Cartoons by Mantegna, the “Triumph of Cæsar,” remain to us, a priceless heritage—saved, it is said, through Cromwell’s influence. The rich Triumph still sweeps past in all its monumental splendour, with the smoking incense-burners, the beautiful draped youths leading sacrificial beasts, the war elephants in stately line, the captives, the trophies and the spoil—a relic of those great old days of Mantua.¹

called attention to this work, pointing out that there was no evidence of the “Love” having perished or come to England. I find that Symonds went to Mantua to trace out this sculpture, and suggested it as the original. See my *Renaissance in Italian Art*, Part ix. Analysis: “Michelangelo.”

¹ I visited the Palace of Hampton Court lately, and saw the Cartoons in their new home in the Orangery, under good conditions of lighting and even temperature. Though the “great Mantuan collection” has thus disappeared

Meanwhile in vain did those who had raised the storm seek to allay it with smooth speeches and letters. Carlo de Nevers, though preparing to leave for Mantua, sent special messengers to Paris, Milan, and Turin. The Princess Maria herself wrote to the Duke of Savoy, the Prince of Piedmont, and her own mother the Infanta Margherita; and her bridegroom, the Prince de Rethel, to the Emperor and Empress, the King of Spain, the Pope, and Cardinal Barberini. The Duc de Nevers, travelling incognito, and taking the road of Germany, so as to avoid Savoy, reached Mantua on January 17, 1628; and with his new daughter-in-law, his son, Carlo de Rethel, and his second son, the Duc de Mayenne, attended solemn Mass with the *Te Deum* in the Cathedral. He now took over the government, and must be held responsible for all that followed. But his first acts were popular. Taxes were lightened or abolished; the old Court officials confirmed in their places; Striggi—the reward of his services in securing the succession—made a Marquis, with an annual pension of 5000 scudi.

That astute politician had thus played his own game successfully; but his place in Mantuan story is now filled by sterner matter, which his own diplomacy had evoked—by the tramp of armed legions and the sound of cannon. For all this stream of courtly correspondence, this unction of diplomacy proved quite unavailing to still the troubled waters. Don Francesco Gonzaga, son of the Duke of Guastalla, with four hundred horse and eight hundred infantry, was preparing a raid upon Viadana and Canneto. In Cremona and elsewhere cavalry were awaiting orders; and now Don Gonzales de Cordova, the Spanish Governor of Milan, joining hands with his former opponent, the Duke of Savoy, swept in concert over Monferrato, carrying all before them, seizing Alba, Trino, Nizza (Nice), Moncalvo, and holding Casale closely besieged. Furious at this blow, and himself a practised soldier, Duke

into space, who knows—as Dr. Luzio has suggested—what treasures may be yet preserved unrecognized in the older private collections, the “*castelli signorili*” of England? Only recently the Titianesque head of Isabella d’Este emerged (Goldsmidt Collection), and that of her son Federigo, a lovely boy, by the hand of Francia; while the portrait of the same Princess with a little dog in her lap, by her Court painter, Lorenza Costa—identified by Dr. Luzio—is still in Hampton Court, where is that of Lodovico Gonzaga, Duc de Nevers. A similar portrait of Isabella, by G. Campi, was at Dorchester House.

Carlo was getting ready a force of twelve thousand infantry and two thousand horse when Count Nassau arrived in the city, as special envoy, bearing a letter from the Emperor.

For behind all these troubles—and gravest of them all—was the question of Investiture, of the recognition by his Cæsarean Majesty of the Nevers Gonzaga in their Dukedom. We have seen already that Federigo, first Duke of Mantua, as well as his ancestor, the first Marquis, had received their title and dignity direct from the Emperor—in the latter case from Sigismund, in the former from Charles V. Though it may be clear to the student of history that the real power had come to these Gonzaga originally from the people (now, in 1629, a neglected cipher throughout Italy), and the Imperial confirmation sought merely to give lustre to a position already and securely acquired, yet that confirmation was no less clearly regarded by the Emperors—especially by Charles V and his successors—as of first importance, as making Mantua a secure support for their hold on Italy. The settlement and marriage, rushed through while Duke Vincenzo was yet dying, really overrode the Emperor's wishes—which we have seen to have favoured the Guastalla branch—in this vital matter, and applied for his later consent merely as a matter of form. He now checkmated this move by declaring that, the direct line of succession having been broken, the two Duchies must be surrendered into his hands as their feudal superior, to be returned to Duke Carlo as and when he deemed fit. On the other hand, Duke Carlo claimed that he had inherited the Duchies as the legitimate successor of Duke Vincenzo; but, without doubt, counting secretly on the promises and support of France.

Things were at this stage when Nassau arrived with the Emperor's letter of April 7, in which he expressed his disapproval of the invasion of Monferrato by Spain and Savoy, and invited Duke Carlo to meet these last at a conference, to be held under his own presidency. Still manœuvring for position, Duke Carlo accepted this invitation, on condition he should retain jurisdiction over, and enjoy the revenues of, Mantua, and that Monferrato should be evacuated by the invaders. "But Nassau, who knew secretly that Carlo was

expecting foreign aid, refused any concessions ; and, when the efforts for a friendly settlement by Pope Urban VIII proved useless, intimated to the Duke the Imperial admonition (*monitorio*) of August 16, giving him a time limit of one month to accept his terms, under penalty of banishment. Carlo, though he knew his danger, would not resolve on this step, but sent his son, the Prince de Rethel, with Marquis Pirro Gonzaga to Vienna, to try and move the Emperor from his decision. But, though the Prince was well received, the Emperor insisted upon becoming absolute master of the feud, and ordered all the parties concerned to appear before him at the beginning of the next year—Spain and Savoy till then to hold for him the strong places they had taken in Monferrato.”¹ Exasperated at this last provision, and finding no help then available from France, Duke Carlo sold his own possessions in that country to raise a force of ten thousand infantry and one thousand horse, which descended into Italy under the Marquis d’Uxelles ; but in the passes of the Alps they were met by the Duke of Savoy, and forced to retire with great loss.

Duke Carlo at this repulse fell into a yet greater rage, and decided to resist at all costs, against the advice of his own son—who had now returned from Vienna—and of his councillors, who saw into what an abyss he was leading his country. Yet the Emperor’s letter (June 23, 1628) from Prague, though addressed to “ my illustrious relative and most dear Prince,” can have left little doubt as to the latter’s intentions. “ That it has come into your mind at this time to elude with various subterfuges the just sequestrations made by us of both one and the other States of Mantua and Monferrato, and to refuse and finally dispute our claim—all this we hear with great displeasure, and hold as showing but little regard for our supreme authority and Imperial jurisdiction. . . . However, for all that, we have granted to the pressing instances of the Highest Pontiff a delay of fifteen days, to commence from the 29th of June, to see if in the meantime the will of our client may turn to obey our orders, as his duty therein lies, and so to avoid a war which, in the failure of his obedience,

¹ Cf. Volta, *op. cit.*, 1628.

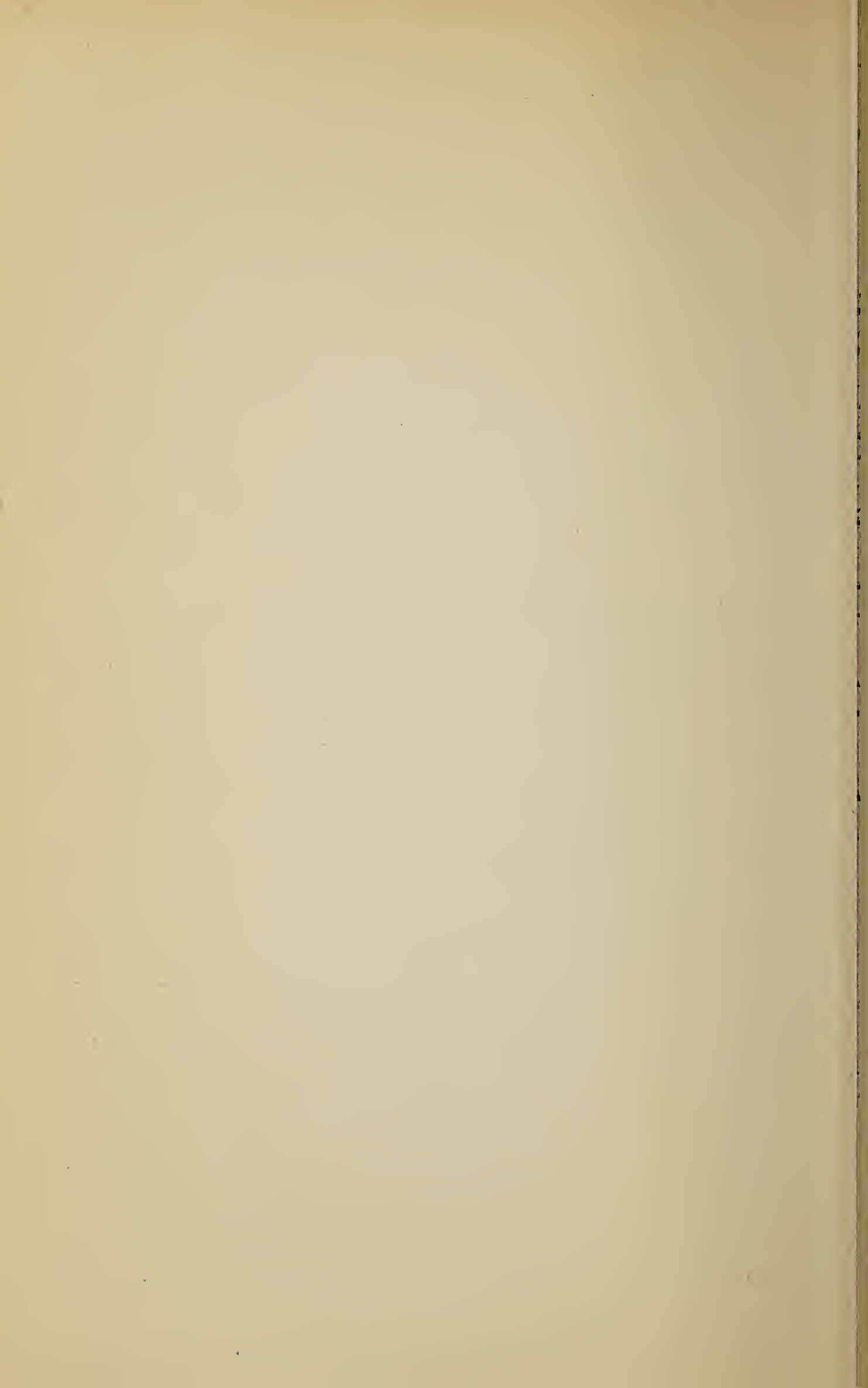


DETAIL OF CEILING DECORATION



THE DREAM OF ANDROMACHE
(BEHIND HER IS THE FURY, PRESAGING WAR)

FROM THE DESIGNS OF GIULIO ROMANO IN THE REGGIA OF THE GONZAGA



will be inevitable." A brave and experienced soldier, but an obstinate man, Duke Carlo was now thoroughly angry. In his bitterness against Spain, he sequestered and sold the property of Milanese subjects within the Mantovano. The Neapolitan jurisconsult, Antonio Marta, who had dared to blame his conduct, was imprisoned by him in the Castello, and there died in the next year. He made the Forte di S. Carlo without Porta Pradella and various entrenchments around Mantua, brought grain into the city, and set a great provision of artillery in strong positions. To the pressing demands of Nassau, who employed every effort to secure his submission, he replied that he would accept the Emperor's terms only when the Duke of Savoy was compelled to retire from Monferrato; and Nassau thereupon sent to him the last "diffida" of the Emperor (under date of February 5, 1629), admitting no further delay or restrictions.

Then came, at last, the long-expected help from France. With a great army King Louis XIII (in March of 1629) descended from the Alps, broke the army corps of Savoy, and prepared to attack the Spaniards without Casale, which city was still gallantly holding out for Mantua. Carlo Emanuele, Duke of Savoy, thought it prudent to accept the French Monarch's terms, and to retire into his own State. Don Gonzales di Cordova came into the same treaty, and, retiring from Monferrato, gave the Mantuans access again thither for their trade across the Milanese. Within a few days the French Monarch had carried through the whole matter with brilliant success; and, "halting his army a little above Susa, treated with the Emperor and King of Spain for the settlement of Italy." Thus ends with this happier note the *Fioretto delle Chroniche di Mantova* of Stefano Gionta, who has carried us from the first legendary beginnings of Mantuan story—when Manto, daughter of Tiresias, made her home among the marshes—to the very year before the city's great fall. It had seemed to the careful old writer, as he turned over the last page of his chronicle, that these great monarchs of Europe were devising peace and rest to Italy and to his own city; but the worst was very shortly and suddenly to come.

For the moment, indeed, France had appeared like the

rescuing knight in the legend of Princess Sabra. But King Louis had now returned across the Alps, contenting himself with recommending to the Courts of Madrid and Vienna the recognition of the rights of Duke Carlo ; and his brilliant military promenade had really left his Mantuan protégé in a worse position than before. The Court of Madrid refused to ratify the Treaty of Susa, and recalled Don Gonzales, sending a new Governor, Marquis Spinola, to continue the war in Monferrato. The Emperor, if he was annoyed already with Duke Carlo, was now yet further exasperated at his having brought down the French into Italy, defied his own offer of settlement, even compromised the Imperial dignity ; and gave orders—while Spinola besieged Casale—to his Generals, Collalto and Aldringen, to invest Mantua itself with twenty-two thousand men. Already, in that September of 1629, the German troops had been massing in the Valtellina, to pour down thence into Italy ; and it is estimated that their numbers cannot have been less than thirty-five thousand foot soldiers and horse. Many of these men were the ruffianly “ *soldatesca* ” who had been trained amid the horrors of the German religious wars ; and there seems little doubt, from later events, that it was in great part the hope of plunder and rapine which had attracted them to the Imperial standards.

“ Boldly,” we are told, “ did Duke Carlo face the threatening storm, and prepare for the most obstinate defence.” A practised soldier, he had the arts of war at his command. Without the city walls, houses, convents, churches were mercilessly destroyed, so that the enemy might have no shelter from his artillery fire ; among the latter that most ancient circular Church of Beato Simone, situated beyond Porta Pradella towards Lago Superiore—which we may recall to have been poor Crichton’s last resting-place. He had restored at the same time the Castles of Governolo, Goito, Gazzuolo, Canneto and Castelfoffredo, filling them with munitions, supplies and fighting men ; had sold some of his Lordships in France, so as to raise money to increase his army, and already a strong body of Venetian troops had arrived in his support—four thousand infantry with four hundred cavalry, sent by the Signory of Venice, who “ did not deem it to her interest

that Mantua should fall into the hands of the Germans"—when suddenly on all sides broke out the thunders of war. Spinola with his Spaniards had attacked Casale, but had been repulsed more than once by the gallant Monferrini with their French allies: unconquered in the previous siege, we shall find that this brave little city held out, undaunted and intact, through the whole of the coming war.

As a last effort for peace, Spain now sent a brilliant diplomatist, Jules Mazarin—afterwards Cardinal and Minister of France—to try and induce Duke Carlo to accept the full authority of the Emperor. This, after the success at Casale, was his chance—had he but had the wisdom to seize it; instead, he rejected every peace proposal, and sent couriers to France, Rome, and Venice to get enough troops to hold back the Imperialists, who, in this late September of 1629, were already sweeping down upon the Mantovano. Duke Carlo now sent to Scipione Gonzaga, Prince of Bozzolo, begging him to set troops at Ostiano to hold the passage of the river Oglio—"but Scipione, remembering those injuries done to him by Duke Ferdinando" (*vide* Chapter XI.), "refused his help, and handed over the castle to Aldringen, whose troops spread ruin over the Mantovano." The crops had failed in that terrible autumn; the Po had again broken its banks, flooding the country and hindering the march of troops. Canneto fell first, "from weakness of the Venetians"; Viadana was betrayed to the enemy; the Castle of Gazzuolo—where Cardinal Vincenzo had once spent idle days of pleasure—fell next (October 26). Two days later the Cæsarean troops had spread to Marcadia, Campitello, and to the old shrine of S. Maria delle Grazie, and from Borgoforte on to Ceresè—"and behold now in Mantua all was terror and confusion." We see the hurried flight of poor nuns, the nuns of S. Chiara di Migliarino, the Canonesses of the Annunziata—like frightened birds, as in that wonderful scene in "The Miracle"—to seek refuge in the convents of the city, through whose gates the country folk, abandoning their ruined lands, were pressing in for shelter and safety: for Duke Carlo had now recalled all his troops, sending only Guerrieri to defend Governolo—a vain effort, since he had quickly to retire, while the town was sacked and "its in-

habitants put to every cruelty.” Mazarin now made a supreme effort to bring about an agreement and suspension of arms, and the Imperial General Collalto, himself a native of Mantua, sent the Gonzaga Prince of Bozzolo to treat with Carlo for terms ; but, furious at this latter’s recent conduct, Duke Carlo refused even to see him. The Imperialists now held the city closely blockaded, and a heavy fire was being poured in from their batteries from the side of Ponte S. Giorgio. “ It was at this moment,” we are told—and it seems as if in mockery of those well-laid plans for the Succession—“ upon the 31st day of October, the Signora Principessa Maria gave birth to a male child, to the sound of the cannon which continually fired upon the apartment where she was ” (no doubt within the Reggia), “ and one cannon ball among them entered the very ante-chamber of her room, to the great terror of the courtiers there assembled.”

By this time the Imperialists had overrun the whole of the Serraglio, and had gained a foothold even within the Borgo S. Giorgio. When we remember that the Ponte S. Giorgio is the bridge which leads directly to the Castello di Corte, we see how perilously near they had now come to this doomed city of Mantua. Duke Carlo, finding it hopeless to meet the enemy in the open field, limited his efforts without to defending the Castle of Goito and to keeping his communications with the Venetian army in the Veronese ; and managed to send Marchese Striggi as his Envoy to Venice, to ask from her Signory for further armed support.

Duke Carlo showed, indeed, no lack of personal courage and energy, and the chronicler gives us the names of some of the leaders of his little army in this gallant defence. Among them the Duc d’Estrées had come from France ; Casa Gonzaga itself was well represented in the Marchesi Luigi, Giulio Cesare, Filippino and Alessandro Gonzaga ; with Marchese Guerrieri and, from Rome, the Baron Orsini, and many Venetian officers, among them the noble Venetian Lodovico Canale, Colonel Mambrino (whose narrative of the defence I shall refer to later), and Colonel Durante, who—though called Monsú Durante by contemporary writers—was a Venetian, a most capable and courageous soldier, who proved himself a tower of

strength to the besieged. But now the Imperialists made their direct attack on the Cerese side, where they were driven back ; while at the same time Aldringen himself attacked the Rocca di S. Giorgio in such fashion that its commander Trussa was wounded, and had to retire, ruining the bridge-head with his own guns to hinder the enemy's further advance. Thanks to Striggi's efforts at Venice, one thousand Venetians had entered Mantua from the Veronese, while ten boat-loads of munitions came to the city by way of the Mincio ; and there came the welcome news that the King of France was coming, with a great army of forty thousand men, to raise the siege. Collalto, too, had heard of this, and opened fresh negotiations, sending Mazarin to Rome to get the Pope's intervention, and proposing a truce for the whole of December. But Duke Carlo broke off the negotiations—" knowing that platoons of French cavalry, precursors of the army led by Maréchal de la Force, were already in Monferrato " ; and, in fact, before long a thousand of these last had got through to S. Maria delle Grazie, and entered the besieged city, to the indescribable delight of the citizens.

Then it was that the Imperialist troops broke loose, and began to devastate the countryside and towns—Borgoforte, Cerese, Curtatone and Montanara—" committing rape, murder and sacrilege, and every cruelty " ; and Collalto, to bring matters to an issue, ordered a general assault, in which Aldringen was to take the bridge of S. Giorgio, while Galasso attacked the Cerese and Pradella gates. On December 8 a furious attack commenced. The companies of Galasso were driven back by the defenders under Orsini and Monsú Durante ; but on the S. Giorgio side, the fortress (Rocchetta) at the head of the causeway leading to the bridge having been attacked most fiercely all day—" our men retired the same evening into the city, knowing they could defend it no longer." " Then the Germans, seeing the Rocchetta abandoned, thought to enter the city without further hindrance, and therefore set themselves in order to march over the bridge into that side of the city. But our men—having made a trench beside the bridge, and set there two cannons which swept the entire bridge—seeing the Germans advance resolutely with banners spread

and drums beating, fired off those two cannons charged with musket balls, which cleared (*sbroforono*) completely the whole bridge ; and there were few of the Germans who did not feel something of that benediction.”¹ Captain Trussa, with his command of barely five hundred men, charged the broken enemy with such fury that he put them to flight with great slaughter, and pursued them to the Rocchetta. “A great number of the Germans died from those two cannon shots, and for many days they left the bodies on the bridge, having no desire to carry them off from the fear of those two pieces of artillery” ; and it was after this heavy loss to the enemy that the attack was turned into a blockade.

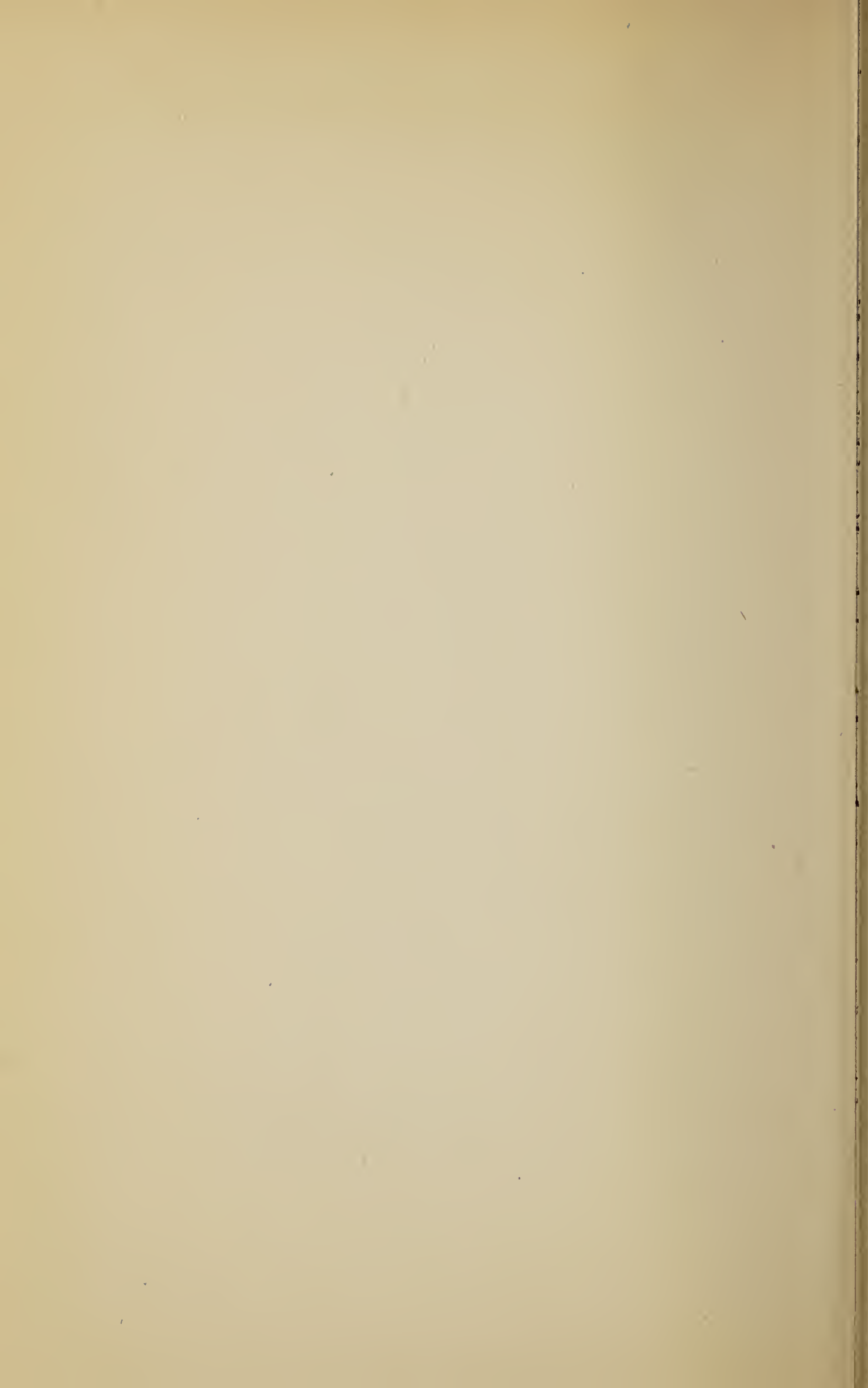
But now appeared a yet more deadly, more terrible enemy, to add fresh horrors to the siege. The plague—a close companion to these wars, when murder and rapine had a free hand, while sanitation was totally neglected—had already appeared in the Milanese, and kept more Venetian troops, in the Bresciano, from coming through to Mantua. It had appeared also among the Imperialists ; and Collalto, either from this reason or disheartened with the failure of the assault, offered again through Mazarin a month’s truce “with open gates,” and withdrew his troops to the other side of the rivers Po and Oglio, with Reggio as his headquarters. Duke Carlo seized the opportunity, with his Captains Durante and Guerrieri, to overrun the country, capture Marmirolo, and bring in many supplies ; and issued strict orders, from fear of the plague, forbidding any citizen from bringing furniture or household goods into the city. But these precautions failed ; for the “Jews who went forth from the city to plunder were those who brought back in this way the contagion.”

Here again the hand of destiny seems to weigh upon the unhappy city ; the wrong-doing of ages to work out its own

¹ *Vide* the detailed account in the *Cronaca* of Scipione Capilupi, published (1857) in the *Raccolta dei Cronisti e Documenti Storici Lombardi*. To understand the whole story, I should explain that the Rocchetta stands at the far end of the bridge of S. Giorgio, which divides the Lago di Mezzo from the Lago Inferiore, and leads directly past the Castello into the city—the length of this whole causeway being, I should reckon, fully a quarter of a mile. The Germans, having taken the Rocchetta, made their attack over the causeway, with the result here described.



CAUSEWAY AND BRIDGE OF S. GIORGIO WITH MANTUA IN DISTANCE



Nemesis. The story of the Jews in Mantua reads to us as one long record of centuries of injustice and persecution. Hated by their Christian fellow-citizens, they were evidently regarded by the Gonzaga rulers as a handy and convenient object of plunder. "In appearance treated with impartial tolerance, the Princes of Mantua made their Semitic subjects pay dearly for the immunities which they enjoyed, as is shown only too fully, with almost tedious periodical repetition, by the decrees, patents, and mandates of the Gonzaga documents; we might almost say that every concession was accompanied by less or more blood-letting of the Israelites—of their purses, their University, or of the richer among them."

We may remember here the hard treatment of the Jew Daniele Norsa, whom Marquis Francesco forced to pay for his votive painting of "Madonna of the Victory." We may recall the monstrous decree of that bigoted Catholic, Duke Guglielmo, who—greedy for their money and recognizing the Jews as indispensable to the commerce of Mantua—to encourage their presence, conceded to them impunity (1577) for any crimes, hidden or otherwise, which they might have upon their conscience.¹ We have seen later how Duke Vincenzo I, under pressure of popular clamour roused by the preaching of Fra Bartolommeo Cambi, hanged (1602) seven of the Jewish leaders, and sent their families into perpetual banishment; while eight years later (1610) all the Jews of Mantua were herded together in a Ghetto, walled in, and having its only issue by four gates, which were locked at sunset and opened at dawn. And in this Christmas of 1629 it was the hated and down-trodden Jews who, avid always for gain, seem to have brought into the city that terrible pestilence which was to prove its destruction.

Though things looked brighter at the beginning of the new year (1630), with hopes of aid from Venice and France, the plague was now established within the city. Early in March,

¹ Vide A. Luzio, *op. cit.* ch. i. The words "*Ne, ob timorem pœnæ propter delicta quæ ab ipsis fortasse patrata essent, deterreantur*" are an actual incentive to ill-doing. On the other hand, the Jews accepted (willingly or not) the extortion of these rulers as their only shelter against the anti-Jewish fury of their fellow-citizens, on whom their interest was fixed, by Ducal decree of 1601, at 17 per cent. for larger loans and 15 per cent. for lesser.

when some companies of French had entered and success had followed, it had claimed already 104 victims. There was great disquietude among the citizens ; and, on April 7, the relics of the Most Precious Blood were displayed—the Duke and his family and the chief magistrates being present—and carried in solemn procession along the streets. “ But God in His anger did not hear their prayers, and the plague and famine even increased . . . this plague killed whoever was seized of it in less than twenty-four hours, and in every parish might be counted fifty or sixty dead within the day ; wherefore at last the funeral cars did not suffice, nor even the boats to carry the dead bodies without the walls and throw them into the lakes, so that they remained unburied in the streets.” Holding a council of war at Guastalla, the Imperial Generals, Aldringen and Galasso, decided not to press the attack, but to let the plague do its fell work ; and on May 29, 1630, came a terrible loss for Mantuan hopes in the defeat by Galasso of a Venetian and French army advancing to their relief, which was broken and pursued by the Imperialists as far as Peschiera and Verona. In Venice at this time the Mantuan Envoy, Marchese Striggi, had himself died of plague ; while in Mantua itself, by the month of May, 4087 persons had already died of the pestilence, and by June their number could no longer be counted. Through those terrible heats, the “ *calori estivi* ” of the Mantuan summer, the pitiless Pestilence had raged—claiming its countless victims, so that the multitude of dead bodies poisoned the air—with Famine and War as its grim companions ; for now the Cæsarean armies had returned to the attack, occupying again Borgo S. Giorgio and the heights of Cerese, Predella, and Porto, and held the city closely blockaded. “ Within Mantua,” says the *Cronaca*, “ through the pest there died 100,000 persons, seeing that of the 60,000 who were registered as citizens (of whom there were 35,000) or had taken refuge in the city from the surrounding country, there were scarcely left in Mantua, after the city’s capture by the Germans, more than 8000 persons. And the shops were closed, nor could any one be served even for money, and everything was at famine price, from bread upwards. In a word, it became clearly recognized that the sins of this city

had moved God's just indignation to send the scourge, which was one of the most memorable that had ever descended from His justice upon any city." ¹

"In the midst of these so great miseries and suffering," adds Gionta, "Mantua was betrayed by a lieutenant of the Swiss Guard, a native of the Grisons, named Polino, who had charge of the Guard at the Ponte S. Giorgio"; and here the *Cronaca* of Capilupi (which ends at this point) is supplemented for us by that most valuable and interesting *Cronaca* of Captain Giovanni Mambrino, who was an eyewitness of the horrors of the sack and fall of Mantua in the early morning of that 18th of July 1630. It would seem that, to economize the soldiers still left him, Duke Carlo had discarded as useless the armed boats which watched the enemy and patrolled the Mantuan lakes—notably the Laghi di Mezzo and Inferiore. Aldringhen had taken advantage of this to send a Swiss trumpeter, under pretext of negotiations, to the Ponte S. Giorgio, then guarded by one of this latter's compatriots, a certain Polino, an officer of the Swiss Guard of the Castello; and so won him over that this traitor informed the enemy leaders of the forces of Duke Carlo, the condition of Mantua, and finally planned to give into their hands the city itself. The plan was laid to attack on that side at night by water: Count Colloredo was in charge of the main assault, while at the same time feint attacks were to be made on the Pradella and Cerese Gates to confuse the defenders.

Let us hear now the narrative of Mambrino, which I found in the Marucelliana Library of Florence, and which is invaluable to us as a direct impression of this historic tragedy. "The Barons, Colonels, and Sergeant-Generals of the army of His Cæsarean Majesty, led by Aldringhen and Galasso, knowing that the defences of the city were weakened by breaches made in various parts, and knowing too the terrible mortality caused within the city by the plague, resolved to attempt a general assault, in connivance with the traitor Giovanni Bolini" (he is called elsewhere Polino) "of the Grisons, who had become

¹ "Memorie di molti miserie," etc. The writer there says "cento mille persone," but may refer to the total loss, including children and women, as well as the armed forces of the defenders.

a spy of the Germans ; and to attempt it by way of the Ponte S. Giorgio, where this traitor lieutenant of the Guard was in command. . . . These plans were all laid for the night of the 16th, and the army advanced with such silence that it was impossible for them to be detected, and all reached their appointed places ; while, one hour after midnight, the Generals advanced with the main body of the army towards S. Giorgio, but were obliged to defer their attack to the night following for the arrangements to be completed."

For boats were being brought up from Governolo in carts, and in these boats were embarked eighty soldiers "ready to risk their lives"—with orders to take at all risks the trench guarded by the French under Marshal D'Estrées, and then set their portable drawbridge over the broken bridge. "And this commission was carried out with the greatest valour and promptness ; and the French, being driven out of the trench, and in great part cut to pieces, the Germans advanced with the greatest boldness, and suddenly became masters of the bastion, the gardens and soon after of the Castello itself, with but little loss to their own soldiers." All the vast interior of the Reggia, with its immense courtyards, was now filled on a sudden with armed men, before the defenders could use their batteries which commanded the bridge. To the sound of the alarm bells from the churches these last ran to oppose the danger ; but the darkness, uncertainty, and ignorance as to whence came the attack spread terror among the Mantuans.

In the meantime the assault on the other side of the city had gone no less ill for its defenders. "Monsú Durante, still defending himself bravely, had been surrounded by the invading troops, and found himself compelled to surrender at discretion with eight standards and the few soldiers he had with him ; and the Germans were now pouring into the town through the Porta Cerase, which had been left open for the retreat of Monsú Durante and his soldiers. The Pradella Gate and the Fort of S. Carlo, where Prince Orsini fell bravely fighting for the Mantuans, were next taken by the Duke of Saxony, and at the sixteenth hour" (*i.e.* four o'clock in the morning) "the said Duke entered Mantua ; and now the city was full of soldiers, who, mad with fury, fell upon men, women

and children, who were running before them, hither and thither, to the churches to seek for safety." The Duke Carlo, with the Prince de Rethel and Princess Maria, had barely time to dress hastily and to seek refuge in the Citadel; and there, being surrounded by the Germans, sent an offer of surrender and complete capitulation, which "at first rejected, was finally accepted, for the sake of the Princess Maria, who was pregnant and a niece of the Empress Eleonora. And the day following these high personages left the city in the direction of Ferrara; and the Duke, with great firmness of spirit, bore up against the blow, discussing on matters of war, especially of the Albanians and of the Dutch."

But if these "high personages" had thus escaped free, but with their Duchy lost, a far worse fate awaited the unhappy Mantuans. At dawn of that fatal morning of July 18, Aldringen entered from S. Giorgio, and Galasso and the Marquis of Brandenburg from Pradella, "without any opposition," with 12,000 infantry and 1600 horse, and "a great number of robbers and bandits of every nation, including many Lombards." Aldringen at once surrounded the Ducal palace with 3000 soldiers, reserving its spoil for himself; imprisoning the brave Durante and Businello, for whose ransom the Republic of Venice had to pay 20,000 ducats. "Then he gave licence to the Imperialists for three days to sack the unhappy city, and the terrible work began at once (*si commincio nel momento*). The soldiers, like hungry wolves ready for rapine, fell upon the houses and churches. The cries of the victims and the assailants, the sounds of threats, of weapons, of the breaking open of doors and the destruction of furniture, filled the air, and struck terror into all. Not a family remained unharmed by these beasts—for such they must be called—who, not content with all the booty they found in the houses, by the most atrocious tortures forced the citizens to show even what they had concealed—through which many remained maimed and mutilated in their persons, and many others perished. Not only on the adults, but also on little children, boys, women and sick persons, even among the very poorest, they committed these barbarities; the very monasteries were deprived of the necessities of life,

and the sacred virgins had to beg food in the streets from their enemies themselves until the Cardinals and prelates of the city came to their aid.”¹

Let us now hear what Mambrino,² himself a witness and victim, tells us of these horrors. “I remember me that on the very same day that the Germans came to Mantua they commenced to sack and pillage; and so for three days that torment continued, namely, on Thursday the 18th of July, Friday the 19th and Saturday the 20th. And we were compelled to abandon our houses and to run for safety to the churches, both women and men; and poor fathers could be seen dragging after them their children, who were crying, and their voices went up to heaven, and the poor mothers, with their hair dishevelled and well-nigh desperate with evil treatment and handling, fled themselves too as best they could, so that even I myself must needs weep, as I sit writing of that so horrible torment of my country. . . . Then on Sunday, the 21st of July, by the Emperor’s authority, Giovanni Francesco Gonzaga was made supreme Governor of Mantua, with the consent of the Cæsarean colonels who formed his committee . . . and these gentlemen made a proclamation that, on pain of death and of being instantly hanged by the neck until they died, no soldier should do further injury or pillage to any one in the city of Mantua.

“On July the 22nd, the Mantuans having heard the proclamation, came forth from the churches, still terrified out of their senses by the great horrors they had known, and went back to their houses; and then the weeping and laments of these Mantuans were even greater than before, for they found nothing left to help them of all their substance. It was a strange sight (*uno stupore*) to see what inestimable treasures, furniture and riches had been taken from the houses, and to see about the streets the piles of stuffs all going to ruin, while fire had been set to the printing press of Lodovico Osanna, the palace of Marchese Cattaneo and other houses, and that fire lasted three days to the destruction of all the neighbourhood. I will tell you that by reason of the pillage and the forced contribution levied the Germans carried away treasures to their homes. There was the Dogana” (*i.e.* Douane) “and

¹ See Volta, *op. cit.*

² See Cronaca, *cit.*

the Fonteghi, full of silk goods and fine woven stuffs from England, Flanders, and Germany, and cloth of Milan. There was the Ghetto of the Jews, where none could count the great riches found therein; and the five banks, with pledges and treasure valued at more than 800,000 scudi . . . and the Monte di Pietà full of things of value.

“Kindly readers” (*Benigni Lettori*), thus continues poor Mambrino, “forgive me that I cannot but remember one of so many torments suffered in this war. For that I have it most clearly in my memory that immediately after the Germans had entered the city by the Porta S. Giorgio, seeing that my own house lay there adjacent, they forced open the doors, and by main force (*a viva forza*) bound me with cords, so that I lay helpless for four hours, and in that state they kept beating me (*me percotevano*) so that I should show them where the money was kept; and I made signs to them that their own comrades had broken open the chests, so that at last they took compassion and spared to me my life—to me, Giovanni Mambrino, and to Giovanni Battista and Cesare my sons, and may the Lord be ever praised.”

Meanwhile Aldringhen, greedy of his prey, had seized for himself all the riches and treasures of the Ducal palace, “so that his booty was estimated at 8,000,000 scudi, swallowed up by that brutal man.” In this way disappeared the famous “Grotta of precious stones” made by Marchesa Isabella;¹ the priceless collection of arms of the Gonzaga Princes of Mantua—with among them the jewelled sword, valued at 30,000 ducats, given to Duke Vincenzo I by Henry IV, King of France; “the superb collection of paintings by Titian, Giulio Romano, Raphael, Tintoretto, and other famous masters, while the Appartamento di Troia was damaged and in great part destroyed.”² Then the carved stones, the medals and

¹ “Marchesa Isabella had fashioned in the Palazzo di Corte a Grotta, for whose adornment she collected the most famous antiques and statues and medals, and was lavish of precious stones and jewels, in such manner that even the Emperor Charles V was astounded when he saw them.” All this priceless collection was then looted and dispersed; an attempt is now being made (*vide* Chapter VIII.) to reconstruct the Grotta itself.

² We may recall to the reader that many of the paintings thus mourned over by Amadei and Volta, as having perished in the Sack, had actually before

sculptures collected at such expense through many ages ; the two codices of Lucretius and Xenophon, which went to enrich the Library of the Duke of Brunswick, and all that choice library of books and manuscripts ; the incomparable onyx vase, figured from one piece, which went to the same Brunswick Library ; the famous “ tavola Isaica,” and many other objects unique in Europe were destroyed or carried away.¹

Not content with all this, as if his hunger went on increasing, Aldringhen now surrounded the Ghetto with his troops, and told the Jews under pain of death to leave Mantua and the Mantovano within three days, not permitting them to take more than three *ducatoni* per head. Then he ordered a general pillage of the Ghetto, and the booty taken amounted to 800,000 golden scudi in jewels and money, as well as many precious pledges left by the citizens during the siege to have the wherewithal to live. The loss of the Mantuans, in this terrible sack, was reckoned at over twenty millions of gold ; “ and not even yet content, Aldringhen, on the pretext that his cavalry had not shared in the booty, imposed yet a further fine, which was reduced through the prayers of Marchese Gianfrancesco Gonzaga and other noble persons.” We may note here that all the documents agree in throwing upon Aldringhen the blame of this merciless pillage and extortion. The other Generals—such as Galasso, who was also in Mantua—had little to do with it, and Collalto himself was away, “ busied on more honourable matters ” ; nor can the Emperor be entirely blamed. He had let loose the dogs of war to bring Duke Carlo to his senses ; but when he heard of the result was moved to pity and horror.

Meanwhile the unhappy citizens of Mantua had held secret counsel, and sent to Vienna Gianbattista Manenti, who presented to the Emperor such a pitiful picture of the utter

this left Mantua on their way to England. The twelve portraits of Cæsars by Titian were copies, made in Venice by orders of Nys—although possibly Aldringhen believed he had looted the originals. The Sala di Troia happened to be boarded off for repairs at the time of the Sack, and thus escaped the worst damage.

¹ Napoleon tried in vain to get this vase for the Louvre. It perished in the fire at the Castle of Brunswick in 1830. The “ Tavola ” seems to have reappeared later in the Royal Gallery in Turin.

destruction of the city that the monarch was deeply impressed, and sent his absolute orders to Aldringhen to cease any further exactions. That evil man, thinking that Gianfrancesco Gonzaga—whom he had put in power to cover his own robberies—had helped in this appeal, accusing him of peculation and extortion, threw him into prison; where, exposed to great suffering, he died in a few days—"not without suspicion of poison."

But a Concordat had now been arranged by which Duke Carlo had to cede, to Don Cesare di Guastalla, Luzzara, Dossolo, and Reggiolo; to assign to Victor Emanuel, Duke of Savoy, the cities of Trino, Alba, and other places in Monferrato for a yearly payment of 15,000 scudi; and himself must humbly beg from the Emperor for his investiture, which would then be granted him within eight weeks. Aldringhen, when this was published, seeing no chance of further exactions, withdrew his troops to Castiglione di Stiviere and Solferino, where, we are told, he continued his robberies. The wretched Jews, who had been expelled the city, got the Emperor's permission to return, being placed under close discipline. With the turn of the year the plague began to diminish, and on the 2nd day of September 1631—more than a year later—came an Envoy with Imperial letters patent, giving orders that within the space of two days all that army should be removed from Mantua and her territory, if they regarded the favour of His Cæsarean Majesty, the Emperor Ferdinand—an army reduced now by war and plague to 12,000 men, a pitiful remnant of twenty-one regiments of two years earlier.

"Immediately," says Mambrino, "the chiefs in command of the army, to the beating of twelve drums, made proclamation that all the Imperial army should march forth; and now the Lord Duke Carlo was come to Goito, waiting that the Germans should have departed from Mantua. On the 4th day of September, as God willed it, there marched forth the regiments of Ferrari the Italian, of Clinich, of Colloredo, of the Duke of Saxony, of Ottavio Piccolomini from Tuscany, with fifty wagons (*cariagi*) full of plunder taken in the Sack. On the 8th there followed Colonels Husman, de Brandenburg, Bernevalt, and Isolani, with eighty wagons loaded up; and

on the 12th, Colonels Rivara, the Italian, Sultz, Painer, and Picchio, with seventy wagons full. Last of all, upon the 20th, there marched forth Baron Giovanni Aldringen with the 'soldatesca' of Matteo Galasso, who remained himself a hostage in Goito; and with these there went eighty-seven wagons, and in their company marched Colonels Monticcioli and Cignali, with many other wagons loaded with booty; and with them there was that evil traitor, Lieutenant Polino—but when he came without the city gate by his own musketeers he was treated to two hundred musket shots, and that was the traitor's end, even such an end as he deserved." ¹

Such then, as I have said, was the great fall and cruel spoliation of Mantua, the glorious city of the Gonzaga, of "Mantova la gloriosa"—as she could never again be named; such the dire consequence of her later rulers' folly, who, in a critical moment of their own and their country's history, thought first, if not entirely, of their lusts, their pleasures, their selfish interests; and such the merited doom, outside the city's gate which he had betrayed, of the traitor who had delivered her beauty and pride into the spoiler's hands.

¹ *Vide Mambrino, Cronaca, cit.* See also my description of the Sack in *Mantua: Berühmten Städten*, ch. xii.

EPILOGUE

THE FALL OF CASA GONZAGA

WITH the fall of Mantua, her terrible Sack, and the final evacuation of the city by the Imperialists, our story—that wonderful story of the Gonzaga, which in its barest outlines reads almost like a romance—has reached its climax, if not its conclusion. For the famous old city of the Gonzaga never really recovered from the blow she had then received. She lived on—but broken, mutilated, a nerveless shadow of her former grandeur, her old-time brilliance; and the dramatic interest of her story might well lead me to close my pages here. If I have decided, after careful reflection, to carry forward that account to the very last page of Gonzaga history, to the final and complete annexation of Mantua by the Austrian Empire, it is because I feel it impossible to really grasp the earlier elements in the tragedy of her fall without that final sequence; because the characters yet remain on the scene, to work out—in a later generation of these Gonzaga Dukes—and prove to us indisputably the causes which were to make the ruin of their House, the enslavement of their city, a thing foredoomed, inevitable.

While the events described in the conclusion of my last chapter were taking place, our worthy friend, Giovanni Mambrino, had deemed it advisable to retire for four days of solitary meditation—his resting-place during that period of penance being somewhere above the ceiling (*sopra la soffitta*) of the sacristy of the Cathedral of S. Pietro. He seems to have had reason to suspect that the retiring Imperialists intended to take him with them as a hostage; and his recent experiences evidently led him to prefer their room to their company. When he emerged from his hiding-place, “on the

20th day of September 1631, all the Germans had departed, and the city was freed of them. That same day, at two o'clock, Marchese Alfonso Gonzaga entered Mantua, and the keys of the city were presented to him, and he was accompanied by two thousand infantry and two companies of the Most Serene Republic of Venice. Then on the 21st of September, the feast of S. Matthew, the Most Serene Lord Duke Carlo left Goito and entered Mantua, being met by all his people, who stood there weeping with very joy at seeing him, and at recovering their Most Serene Prince and Maria Gonzaga—whom the Lord preserve henceforth in peace for the good and quiet of all Christendom, as well of Italy as abroad. Praised ever be God and the Blessed Virgin Maria *in secula seculorum*. Amen."

But, though Mambrino thus ends his *Cronaca*, very naturally, with a note of pious exultation at the sight of his recovered Serenities, the impression given us in the future records of the stricken city is that once and for all, in that terrible siege and sack, her glory was departed. Even now a fresh blow had fallen upon Duke Carlo himself and Princess Maria in the death of his eldest son and her husband, Prince Carlo, formerly Duc de Rethel. This young Prince, whose marriage had been the precursor of the misfortunes of Mantua—though he had probably no willing share in them, for he seems throughout to have been overruled by his father's wishes and wider experience—had been profoundly impressed by the horrors through which he himself and his city had just passed ; so much so that his health became seriously affected, and he died in the month of August preceding the return of his family to Mantua. Overwhelmed with grief at this fresh loss, Duke Carlo was only restored to public life by the entreaties and exhortations of his daughter-in-law, the Princess Maria, who showed at this moment more firmness than himself.

Help came from neighbouring Italian princes—the Grand Duke of Tuscany sending furniture to fill two noble rooms of the ruined Palace of the Corte, the Duke of Parma silver for the table, the Duke of Modena the very practical present of one hundred pairs of oxen, with as many farm servants, to till the ruined fields ; and it must have been at this time that

Duke Carlo transferred the relics of the famous Grotta of Isabella to the (so-called) Appartamento del Paradiso in the Reggia—where he himself went to reside, and his name yet appears over the architrave of the doors. An effort was made by servants and friends of Casa Gonzaga to recover some part of their lost treasures. We hear of maps and pictures recovered in the trail of the returning army at Cremona and Como; again, in a letter from Brescia (September 4, 1634), of furniture and tapestries which had been stolen from the convoy of Aldringen as far north as Trento—a most cheering instance of the robber being paid back in his own coin; and even later (1640), a Gonzaga portrait by Pourbus appears in a sale at Rome,¹ which had evidently been looted ten years before. Meanwhile it was at least endeavoured to revive something of the artistic splendour and tradition of the past. Duke Carlo, though he tried his best to bring Guido Reni to his Court, had failed to move the Master from Bologna; but from his grandson, Carlo II, Guercino and Sustermans had numerous commissions; statues and paintings were acquired in Venice and Milan, and the inventory of 1665 indicates—especially in the Favorita Palace—the presence of a Gonzaga collection.²

When Duke Carlo died of a syncope—"not," says the chronicler, "without suspicion of poison"—in 1637, and was buried in the church of the Camaldolites at Bosco della Fontana,³ he left as heir to the Dukedoms of Mantua and Monferrato and his Lordships of Nevers, Rethel and Maine in France his only grandson, the little Prince Carlo, born amid the horrors of the siege and now eight years of age, under the guardianship of his mother, the Princess Maria, recommending her to the protection of the Most Christian King of France.

¹ Francis Pourbus the Younger had spent nine years in Mantua (1600–1609), "sharing with Rubens the title of Painter to the Duke." Cf. Wauters, *Flemish School of Painting*. Thus the wonderful back-wave of Italian influence on the great Flemings comes largely through the Mantuan Court—Sustermans at Florence only excepted.

² *Vide* A. Luzio, *op. cit.* ch. iii.

³ The Camaldolite hermits, in gratitude for the benefits he had conferred upon them, set up his monument with a portrait in marble; it was transferred in 1793 to the Basilica of S. Barbara, and is still in that private church of the Gonzaga.

The change of rule seems to have been very much for the better. Even after all he had been through Duke Carlo was still inclined to intrigue with France ; but the Princess Maria, a woman of character and prudence, who dearly loved this Mantua, the city of her birth, would have none of it. Receiving the oath of fidelity from the citizens, in the name of her son, Duke Carlo II, she at once gave her attention to the trade of Mantua in wine and grain, and to assisting that *Arte della Lana* which, as we have seen, had suffered sorely in the past ; and, “ as she attributed the destruction of her country to the excessive deference of the late Duke towards France for private interests of his own, she found herself compelled to decline its further protection, and to prefer that of the Cæsarean Court and the Republic of Venice.” In vain did Louis XIII use every effort to recover his dominant position in Mantua, even sending thither a special envoy from Venice. Princess Maria held firmly to the position she had taken ; and the French avenged themselves by seizing the Citadel of Casale, whose Governor was beheaded by them for correspondence with Spain, and the Spaniards repulsed with loss when they tried to recover that much disputed city.

Under this wise and capable Regency of Princess Maria Mantua began to recover something of her former prosperity. Arts and commerce flourished, religion was cared for and observed, and “ her economy and judgment had re-established the good fame (*decoro*) of Casa Gonzaga among neighbouring Princes.”¹ On October 30, 1647, the Princess Regent, in the presence of the Ambassadors of France and Venice, gave over the government to her son Carlo, who became ninth Duke of Mantua and seventh Duke of Monferrato. Our thoughts go back to Isabella d’Este in this wise Regency of another Mantuan Princess ; and, like Isabella with her rival and namesake, La Boschetti, so too Maria had bitter moments from the passion of her young son for one of her ladies of honour, Margherita della Rovere, who had gained the boy’s affection and was possibly scheming to become his Duchess.

It was the age of literary Academies, and the young Duke

¹ Cf. Volta, 1647. The approving writer gives this Princess the title of “ Heroine ” (*Eroina*), which he has before only bestowed on Isabella d’Este.

took under his direct patronage the famous Mantuan Academy of the *Invitti* ("Unconquered"), who now changed their name to *Timidi*—"a title which seems as exaggerated in its modesty as the former in its pretensions"—with, as their emblem, a nest of young eagles preparing to fly, and the motto "A pennis securitas," alluding perhaps to the eagles on the shield of their young Gonzaga patron. Now, however, came more serious matter to the State in his marriage to Isabella Clara, Archduchess of Austria. Duke Carlo II had ridden out to Mar-mirolo with a train of Gonzaga nobles to meet his bride; and on November 7 (1649) she made her entry into Mantua, "under a rich baldacchino upheld by six mounted pages, and attended by the Dukes of Parma, Modena, and Mirandola with a splendid escort, beneath triumphal arches erected before S. Gervasio, S. Andrea, and S. Pietro"—a reception quite in the sumptuous old Gonzaga tradition. But all this splendid entertainment cost money, which Mantua, with her broken resources, could even yet ill afford; and, combined with what are described as the "caprices" of the young Duke, had so emptied the treasury that a special tax of 180,000 scudi, to be paid within three years, had to be levied on the city. We miss already, with this new ruler, the wise economy of Princess Maria. But a great marriage, for Mantua and her own House, had been planned out by that Princess and Eleonora Gonzaga, now Dowager Empress of Austria; and on December 17 (1650) came letters-patent from the Emperor asking in marriage the younger Eleonora, only sister of the present Duke. The marriage, which took place in 1651, came to bind this new line of the Nevers Gonzaga—through the good offices of these two Princesses, themselves of the elder line—more closely to the House of Austria.

As a sequence of this policy and alliance when war broke out again in Italy, while the Duke of Modena took command of the French, young Duke Carlo stood firm to the Austrian Empire, put into the field three thousand infantry and two thousand cavalry, and was rewarded with the title of Generalissimo of the Imperial troops, with an annual stipend of 80,000 scudi. But he found it difficult to hold his own, when trouble with Monferrato recommenced, and the Duke of Savoy once more

swept down on Trino, drove out the Spaniards who were there, and refused to give up the city to the Gonzaga. The old quarrel between France and the Empire for the dominant position in Italy and Europe was recommencing in the acutest form, and threatening a general conflagration. For France was now becoming the most powerful monarchy in Europe ; England was for the moment out of the picture, torn to pieces by her political and religious dissensions ; Germany, led by Austria, was yet threatened by the last great invading wave of the Ottoman Turk ; and the Spanish Monarchy was becoming more and more effete. It was inevitable that Mantua should be yet again drawn into this struggle of the giants. We have seen that this menace had been present even in the old days of Isabella and Marquis Francesco ; that another peril to the dynasty had been the claims of rival branches of Casa Gonzaga ; and that yet a third lay in the apparently inherited tendency of their race to vicious excesses and consequent reckless expenditure. We shall now find all these elements of mischief combining in one person, the last of his race, to bring about its complete and final ruin.

Princess Maria, embittered at the bad fortune of her son, which he himself attributed to the Duke of Savoy, and still more to the intrigues of France, had gone to Gratz to embrace her daughter, the Empress Eleonora ; and there succeeded (1659) in getting the Investiture of Luzzara and Reggiolo transferred from the Duke of Guastalla to her own son. This new move upset the terms of settlement made, as we have seen, after the fall and sack of Mantua. It was obviously a consequence of the recent marriage, which gave the Gonzaga of Mantua more direct influence at Vienna, and may have seemed at the time another very clever piece of feminine diplomacy ; but we shall find it was to lead to infinite trouble before very long. The Princess had returned, after this successful visit to Vienna, to take her *villeggiatura* at the Palace of Favorita, when she was taken suddenly ill, and died on August 14 (1659) at the age of fifty-one. She had lived through a terrible period of her country's history, and had been able to guide that country, which she so dearly loved, into happier conditions. Her Regency had indeed been a monu-

ment to her good sense and political capacity. She was mourned deeply by the citizens of Mantua—"who loved her as a mother and accompanied her body to S. Maria delle Grazie,¹ where she was buried with the honours due to her rank." Now that her influence was withdrawn, the ship of State begins to totter, the House of Gonzaga to be driven forward, as if irresistibly, to its utter undoing.

To follow at all completely the tragedy of its fall and extinction we have here to recall those side branches of Casa Gonzaga with which, at this point, its story becomes inextricably entangled. Most influential and important among these were the Gonzaga of Guastalla and those of Castiglione del Stiviere; and the trouble began at this time with the Duke of Guastalla, who was naturally exasperated, and used the strongest protests, on finding the Investitures of Luzzara and Reggiolo taken from him. The Duke of Modena, Alfonso IV, intervened, trying to make peace, counselling moderation; but it can scarcely have helped matters when the Duke of Mantua gave (1663) the Palace of Guastalla to his favourite Academy of *Timidi* to hold their literary gatherings. Only two years later Duke Carlo was attacked by a violent fever, which defied medical aid, and he died on August 14, 1665, being buried beside his mother in the great pilgrim church of S. Maria delle Grazie. "Of the death of Carlo," says the chronicler, "when he had barely reached the age of thirty-six, there were different opinions; since some attributed it to immoderate lusts, others to maladies contracted in Venice and elsewhere, and there was also a suspicion of poison. In any case there were grave scandals derived from his illicit correspondence, which even found their way into print: though his subjects regarded him with affection for his sweetness of character and generosity." He left as heir his only son, Ferdinando Carlo, then only thirteen years of age, under the guardianship of his widow the Archduchess Isabella Clara; but unhappily left him also "heir to the same ill-gotten

¹ The ancient pilgrim church of S. Maria delle Grazie—which, when I visited it last year, was awaiting the feast of S. Luigi Gonzaga—well merits a visit, both for itself and its monuments (that of Princess Maria is over the high altar) of the Gonzaga and Castiglione families. Once rich in offerings, in gold and silver plate, the church was plundered in the Mantuan wars.

passions (*malnate passioni*), in which he was only too inclined to follow the scandalous footsteps of his father." For this Ferdinando Carlo was to be the last Gonzaga Duke of Mantua : with the tragedy of his career our story will have reached its end.

The Archduchess Isabella Clara, when she took over the government as Regent for her young son, found herself faced with difficult conditions. Like Princess Maria, she was confronted by the pressure of France ; but firmly asserted her decision to remain neutral and independent. She had before her the disputed question of the lands of Luzzara and Reggiolo ; and now the Gonzaga of Castiglione had become involved in a most bitter quarrel with his kinsman of Solferino, which resulted in Don Carlo Gonzaga, Prince of Solferino—who had tried to force his way into the Castle of Don Ferdinando Gonzaga at Castiglione del Stiviere—being imprisoned in the Castello at Mantua. The Gonzaga at Mantua, as Dr. Luzio points out, had always to use "many *ménagements* with these turbulent relations, to approach them on the diplomatic and friendly side, and even to turn to advantage their quarrels and their crimes " ; and in this case the Archduchess Isabella Clara wisely referred the matter at issue to the Emperor, who got it arranged through his own envoy. But fresh trouble was ere long to break out with these Gonzaga of Castiglione of Stiviere. A turbulent race, they go back to Rodolfo, that uncle of Marquis Francesco whom we have seen (*vide* Chapter VII.) to perish fighting bravely in the great conflict of Fornovo.¹ He was said to have beheaded his wife, Antonia Malatesta ; and his second wife, who survived him, was found one day strangled by her own maids of honour, who had conspired to rob her. Rodolfo himself lived—I am told by its Director—in the very house, now used for the Mantuan Archives, where I am at this moment writing these words, and which must have seen also the saintly presence of his descendant, S. Luigi Gonzaga.

"The story of the Gonzaga of Castiglione del Stiviere,"

¹ Schivenoglia writes : " On the feast of Christmas, 1483, it is said (*se dixe*) at Mantua that Ser Rodolfo caused to be beheaded," etc. The story is thus given as hearsay, and is questioned by Dr. Luzio.

writes Dr. Luzio, "presents the contrast of an almost morbid ascetism and the fury of unrestrained passions." The grandfather of S. Luigi himself was suspected of having poisoned Francesco Maria della Rovere, Duke of Urbino.¹ Rodolfo, brother of the Beato Luigi, was a tyrant, a false coiner who had made away with his uncle, and who wished, like Caligula, for his people to have but one head that he might cut it off; killed by an arquebus shot, his body was thrown to the vengeance of his exasperated subjects. Another brother, Diego, was stabbed to death in his mother's arms; and the headsman—lent to the Lord of Castiglione by his cousin of Mantua—was always kept busy. In the period we are now reaching, Don Ferdinando, one of the worst of his race, was Lord of Castiglione del Stiviere; and by every method of extortion and cruelty was driving his unhappy subjects to despair.

Before this time Archduchess Isabella Clara, on taking over the Regency, had also taken on the quarrel with the Gonzaga of Guastalla, whose lands of Luzzara and Reggiolo had been included in the Investiture granted (1666) to her son, Ferdinando Carlo. The Gonzaga of Guastalla go back to that famous soldier of fortune, Ferrante Gonzaga, third son of Marquis Francesco and Isabella d'Este, whose life-story is a romance of adventure. Brought up in Spain, he was present, very fortunately, at the sack of Rome, since he was thus able (*vide* Chapter VIII.) to save his mother, Isabella. He took part in the siege of Florence, and held high military commands in Milan, Naples, and Flanders, where he died in the Emperor's service; he had before this acquired Guastalla (1539), and left its Lordship to his son Cesare, who returned there to live in 1567.

Earlier than this Cesare had resided in Mantua, devoting himself to art and letters, and now sought to make Guastalla a city of Renaissance culture. He formed there a collection of pictures, statues, and antiques; founded in 1562 the Academy of the *Innvaghiti*, and sought to beautify his city with

¹ *Vide* Dennistoun, *Memoirs of the Dukes of Urbino* (vol. iii.). Here, too, evidence is very uncertain; but the Duke's Mantuan barber, who was said to have dropped poison into his ear, was torn to pieces and quartered in the streets of Pesaro.

wide streets, and strengthen her with fortresses and artillery. He had married (1560) Camilla Borromeo ; and when he died in 1575 was succeeded by his son, Ferrante. It is to be noted that these Gonzaga of Guastalla were independent princes, receiving—as in the case of this Ferrante—their Investiture direct from the Emperor ; and their tradition is one of cultured and munificent rule. Their record throughout seems a clean one, free from the domestic tragedies of the Houses of Castiglione and Sabbioneta, or even the public scandals and vicious extravagance of their cousins of Mantua. Like his father, Ferrante III was a friend of learning, who introduced (1623) a printing-press into Guastalla, welcomed scholars at his Court, and was himself President of the Academy of the *Invaghiti*. He was a friend to Tasso in that poet's troubled life ; Guarini put before him for criticism his *Pastor Fido*, and to him was dedicated the first Venetian edition of *L'Aminta*. He loved peace and ensued it, but it escaped him when the Emperor placed upon his shoulders (1624) the onerous position of his *Commissario Generale* in Italy ; then followed the terrible issue of the Mantuan Succession, in which we have seen (*vide* Chapter XI.) the House of Guastalla to become closely involved. A reference to the genealogy of Casa Gonzaga, given at the end of this work, will show the reader at a glance how this matter of the Succession stood. The Gonzaga of Guastalla derived directly in the elder line from Ferrante, third son of Francesco and Isabella ; those of the Nevers branch from Lodovico, third son of Duke Federigo, in the generation succeeding, who had inherited the French Dukedoms of Nevers and Rethel from his aunt, the Duchesse d'Alençon. Had Duke Guglielmo died without issue, it is clear that Lodovico would have been next in succession ; and, in fact, we have seen (*vide* Chapter X.) that he had been at one time actually suggested as Duke. The claim of the Nevers branch was thus in itself a strong one, but it became later a political issue : France gave to them powerful support, while the Emperor came to favour the Guastalla House, which on the conclusion of peace received from him, as his faithful supporters, these very lands of Luzzara and Reggiolo. Torn from the peace he loved, and drawn into the currents of a terrible

war, Duke Ferrante III had died on August 5, 1630—only a few days after the Sack of Mantua—of the plague, “deserted by all from fear of that terrible contagion.” But when the Duc de Nevers had succeeded to Mantua, Duke Ferrante sent his son Cesare to Vienna to support the claims of their family. This latter remained there through the war and the two years following—during which the plague still kept him out of Italy—and died in Germany in 1632, being succeeded by his son, Ferrante IV. It was this last, who married a daughter of Alfonso d’Este, Duke of Modena, who had obtained from the Emperor Ferdinand III, in 1638, the Investiture of Guastalla with these lands, now under dispute, of Luzzara and Reggiolo.

When war broke out in 1655, and Duke Carlo II, brought closer to Austria by his recent marriage, took definitely the side of the Empire against France, he had reopened his claim to these lands ; that claim carried forward successfully (1659) by his mother, the Princess Maria, was yet sustained by his widow ; and when (1669) Duke Ferdinando Carlo came of age he threw himself into the quarrel with all the ardour of youth, and became, we are told, “highly irritated because, in spite of the Imperial Investiture, the lands in question were still withheld from him.” The question was becoming acute, and threatened open strife when a plan of peaceable issue was discovered. Duke Ferrante V had only two daughters, by name Anna Isabella and Maria Vittoria, the first of whom was now of an age to marry. Why not marry her—the suggestion seems to have come from the Empress at Vienna—as heiress of Guastalla to the young Duke of Mantua, and end thus happily the whole dispute ? In August of 1670 the treaty of marriage was drawn up, and signed on December 26 following. By its terms Duke Ferrante V renounced for ever his claim to these lands of Luzzara and Reggiolo in favour of the Duke of Mantua, gave to his daughter as dowry 200,000 scudi, and to her issue on his death the Duchy of Guastalla itself ; on condition that if there were no male issue to the marriage that Duchy would then pass to Don Vespasiano, brother of Duke Ferrante, or whichever other relative on the father’s side (*agnato*) should be next in succession. No time was lost in applying for the Imperial approval to this contract, which was accorded by a

diploma of February 21, 1671 ; and on April 7 of that year the marriage took place—" to the great joy of the Mantuans, who hoped thus to see the dissensions ended, the power of their Prince increased, and that the very high natural gifts of mind and body of the new Duchess would remove from the heart of the Duke every inclination to those vices of sensual indulgence (*lussuria*) in which he was becoming strangely engulfed." The inhabitants of Luzzara and Reggiolo now swore fealty to their new Duke. The future seemed full of rosy hopes ; and at this time, to give employment to his subjects at Mantua, there was constructed a large building for silk-weaving near the Ponte de' Mulini, using the waters of Lago Superiore to give the motive power—" which *fabbrica* might have proved very profitable to the country, had not war come to intervene."

Without possessing any wish to assume the pose of a moralist in dealing with these later Gonzaga Dukes it becomes sometimes difficult to escape that attitude ; and most of all with Ferdinando Carlo, the last and—if we are to judge him by results—the worst of his race. How such a career might have appealed, fifty years later, to our own Hogarth ! How he would have driven his graver deep and yet deeper into the copper at every stage of this " Rake's Progress " of eighteenth-century Italy—have pictured the prodigal immersed in every indulgence and extravagance, have built up the story in its successive stages, and carried it to the inevitable end ! For, if ever man had all the chances of life and happiness placed by kindly fortune within his grasp, that man was surely the young Mantuan Duke. Virtue beckoned to him in the charming form of his beautiful young Duchess, endowed with rich gifts of mind and body, bringing with her as dowry peace to himself and his lands. The Austrian Court smiled upon the union which it had approved, and even planned ; Italy was at peace—the storm between France and the Empire then only muttering in the distance. On the other side, Pleasure—a golden-haired siren, her fair locks entwined with pearls, the wine-cup or the dice-box in her hand—was ever calling to that side of the man which seems a part (and here our judgment must be surely merciful) of the terrible heredity of this later

Gonzaga race ; and to meet this craving, a “ miracle of opal and pearl, asleep in her lagoons,” in almost perilous proximity . . . was Venice.

“ For Venice had become in those days the pleasure-ground of Europe, where *bals masqués* formed a necessary portion of existence, and Carnival was prolonged for months ; where all ranks, all classes of society (even the convents not excepted) joined in the universal scramble for amusement.”¹ If I wrote these words of the late eighteenth century, when already the end of the “ Serenissima ” was drawing near, they are scarcely less true of this century preceding. The Président de Brosses (1739-40), visiting the city of the lagoons, found the strongest passions of the old Republic coming to centre round the opera, the concert-room or the gaming-table, and “ Carnival here to be reckoned as about six months, commencing the 5th of October and ending on Ascension, during which time everybody goes about masked, whether priest or layman, even the Papal Nuncio and the Prior of the Capucins ” ; while he leaves at last this city of pleasure with a sigh of regret for “ mes chères Ancilla, Camilla, Giulietta, Angeletta, Caterina, Spina, Agatina, et cent milles choses en a, les unes plus jolies que les autres.”

To Duke Ferdinando Carlo his yearly Carnival had become a necessity ; life without it a thing dull, colourless, almost intolerable. Though the winter of 1675 had been intensely cold—even the Po frozen over so that it could be crossed by beasts—“ yet, in spite of this, our Duke would not forego his wonted visit on his *bucentaur* to Venice, to enjoy the diversions of the Carnival, to which every year he gave himself up without shame and without limit of expense. Nor did he only take part in the spectacles and public amusements, of which there are always plenty in that city ; but wished to hold a Court the most flourishing und unfettered in its conduct (*fiorita e galante*), and in the Palace where he dwelt maintained for whole nights a number of dissolute women for theatrical displays, music, and banquets, so that he had a worse name than Sardanapalus of old.” Nor did Ferdinando Carlo limit these excesses to

¹ Vide Selwyn Brinton, “ The City Triumphant ” (*The Renaissance in Italian Art*, Part vii. ch. iii., “ The Fall of Venice ”).

his younger days, or to Venice alone : but would show old Mantua, too, some taste of that wild life, would fill her streets, yet scarred by war, with masked merriment, and wake those vast ruined halls of the Reggia to the sound of midnight revelry. "The Carnival of 1688"—which he seems to have spent for once at home—"was one of the wildest and noisiest ever seen. For the Duke, not content with theatres, balls, music, and masquerades, in which he rivalled the Duke of Modena in spending madly, would fain keep open table for the whole month for noble *forestieri* ; and, making a selection of twenty-four ladies and as many cavaliers, set on foot a splendid procession on horseback (*cavalcata*) through the city, the which was adorned with statues, triumphal arches, and other devices, finishing with dancing and suppers which lasted whole nights together in the State rooms of the Palace." What—we cannot avoid asking here—was the position of his young Duchess in these wild orgies of pleasure ? Brought hither from the quiet little town of Guastalla, from a Court whose tradition had been one of sober rule and culture, to this Mantua with its grandeur and its ruins, its too recent memories of past horrors, its lust of present folly, there can be little doubt—and later events come to confirm this—that she regarded this kind of life with aversion, probably with secret horror. Her father had now died, confirming by his will what had been given on marriage to herself, and leaving the rest of his estate to his other daughter, Maria Vittoria. Duke Ferdinando Carlo, as her husband, had lost no time in securing his hold on Guastalla and the allegiance of its inhabitants : but there now began another and yet more bitter family quarrel, for there were no children of his own marriage, and Guastalla was a fief which actually passed in the male line of descent.

Don Vincenzo Gonzaga had returned from Sicily, where he had been Viceroy, to live in his own half of the Palace of Guastalla, which he had a right to enjoy ; and there came to meet Maria Vittoria, second daughter of the late Duke, won her to become his wife (June 30, 1679), and in so doing further strengthened, with the approval of the neighbouring Princes of Modena and Parma, his existing claim to the

Guastalla Dukedom. In place of a settlement which had seemed—and might have been—friendly and final, the old dispute had thus reopened ; and Duke Ferdinando Carlo found himself in front of a rival of his own House whom it was difficult either to destroy or depose.

Meanwhile all that mad life of careless expenditure was beginning to call for payment—to become a problem harassing, insoluble. His own subjects were weighed down with increasing taxation ; he had contracted debts which he had not the money to meet, and always there was the temptation—the Minister of all-powerful France at his elbow, ready to offer smooth words of counsel, asking nothing but his friendship ; or perhaps, merely as a guarantee for the loan, some city that he could well spare for a while . . . *why not Casale ?* My grandfather—whose memory I revere, of whom I might say, like Ruskin of his father, that he was “ an entirely honest merchant,” one who, loving his Bible, could yet enjoy his Byron, soaring up then on the wings of “ Lara ” and “ Childe Harold ”—was wont to bid his children remember always that “ the borrower is servant of the lender.” If I venture here to include this much of my family history, it is because these words—which I have never forgotten—find such a terrible illustration in this story of this last of the Gonzaga. For he had listened, in a fatal moment, to that tempter at his side ; the money—much needed, a mere private accommodation which need not be known to any third party—had passed into his hands . . . and from that very moment he was lost.

I do not propose to more than briefly indicate here the pitiful story which follows—the secret scheming, betrayal of friends, official lies, hesitations and vain regrets, public scandal and loss of credit and friends. In 1680, through Count Vialardi, Governor of Casale, Count Ercole Mattioli, Minister of Mantua at Venice, and Marquis Guerrieri, who was sent specially to Paris, the matter was put in hand. France was ready to promise unlimited support in men and money ; but the Courts of Vienna and Spain had already got wind of these proceedings, and their protests and threats of armed intervention made Duke Ferdinando Carlo to become hesitating and alarmed. He put the blame weakly on his Ministers,

even imprisoning Guerrieri for a few days to give a show of truth to his excuses : but the French, enraged at this conduct, captured Count Mattioli at Pinerolo and threw him into a dungeon, where he shortly afterwards perished.¹ But the Gonzaga Duke had probably received his money, or, in any case, gone too far to draw back ; and the year following he gave his assent to an agreement (*concordat*), by virtue of which the French, presenting themselves (September 29, 1681) at the Citadel of Casale, had it handed over to them by Count Vialardi.² The Duke again tried to put the blame upon others—the cowardice of the Governor, the bad faith and aggression of the French—and sent his excuses to Vienna ; but no one believed him, and even the Senate of Venice—a crowning insult from his city of delight—prohibited him from any further intercourse with her nobles. It was said that the money he had pocketed from France was only 100,000 scudi—a cheap price for his dishonour ; and now the French commander in the Citadel, under pretext of inviting the Magistrates of Casale to dinner, had them all arrested, chased out the guard of the Duke, and made himself complete master of the city. Vainly then did the Duke fall into a fury at this act of aggression, and send out bitter complaints and protests : he was held to have his deserts, and was despised and laughed at in all the Courts of Europe.

From this time forward there can be little doubt that he remained under the control of France, though the fact was—

¹ I saw once, in the hands of Dr. Brinton, of Philadelphia, U.S.A., a treasured copy of *The Diurnal*, published at the very time of Charles I's execution, in which that King, denying the charges on which he was condemned, yet alluded to one wrong-doing which might then be finding its just judgment—meaning, said the reporter, my Lord of Strafford. One wonders whether, in like manner, amid his orgies of pleasure, the ghost of poor Mattioli ever rose to haunt his Ducal master.

² The Castello of Casale—which had been a Roman colony under the name of Sedula, but was renamed Casale Sancti Evasii after its destruction by Alaric—was constructed (1469) by William VIII, Marquis of Monferrato, on the ruins of an older fortress : but was a century later (1561) restored by Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga, who made it a “small fortress.” S. Luigi Gonzaga was in Casale (1579–80) as a child ; and (in 1590–95) Duke Vincenzo I built its Citadel, which was demolished (see later) on the surrender of the French garrison to the Allied Armies after the siege of 1695, though the Castello was only dismantled of its outer forts, and still survives.

for obvious reasons—kept secret. In 1684 the Academy of the *Timidi* was so crowded that some Mantuans joined together to form a new Academy, with the still most modest name of the *Imperfetti*, its device an unfinished theatre with the legend “*Scenis decora alta futuris*”; and the Duke, who had, we are told, a “passion for poetry,” gave it his august patronage. Two years later he was in Venice, taking part in the joys of Carnival, distinguished by his rich retinue and shameless excesses; then went to Rome to meet the famous Queen Cristina of Sweden, joined his wife at Bologna, then on to Genoa “accompanied by the envoy of the King of France”; and returned to Mantua on hearing of the death (December 5, 1686) of his aunt, the Empress Eleonora Gonzaga, at the age of fifty-eight. In 1687 he was in Vienna, received with honour by the Emperor; his purpose, suggests the chronicler, not so much to take part in the war against the Turk, which was still continuing, as to receive honours and perhaps to remove the suspicion of adherence to France. He went on, however, to Buda, was a spectator of the defeat of the Ottoman Turk; and returned in 1688 (after that Carnival which I have described at Mantua) with a suite of five hundred and fifty persons, and fifty tents richly furnished for himself, his gentlemen and pages—probably a troublesome contingent for those who were in charge of the actual fighting which was then taking place round Belgrade. It is difficult to judge how far these journeys were due to a genuine Crusading impulse, to the man’s restless vanity, or were a cover for his real and secret understanding with France. An incident which occurred in the year following (1689) seems to throw a strong light on this last motive for his conduct, as still being “servant of the lender.”

In these last years Don Ferdinando Gonzaga, Prince of Castiglione del Stiviere, “not content with following the footsteps of his ancestors in oppressing his subjects, seemed to study every method of driving them to despair.” He increased taxation on objects most necessary to life, including cloth and every kind of beast; had even falsified in his mint the money of other States—notably of the Papal States—and forced this counterfeit coinage to be put into circulation

by his own subjects, treating all who opposed him as rebels. Beneath the surface at Castiglione a storm of vengeance was brewing; while Guastalla had passed under the control of the Mantuan Duke. When the marriage settlement with Anna Isabella, which gave him Guastalla, had been drawn up, it was there expressly agreed that no further fortifications should be added to the city; and this “not only from jealousy on the part of the Dukes of Modena and Parma, but from the fact that with Guastalla as a fortress our Duke might hinder navigation on the Po.” In spite of this, little by little, Duke Ferdinando Carlo had gone on strengthening the city with bastions, so that it had become a real *place d’armes*; and to do this had brought disguised engineers and French officers to direct the work. The Emperor, becoming informed of all this, and warned by the example of Casale, took strong action at once. Advised by him, Count Fuensalida, the Spanish Governor of Milan, descended (1689) without warning on Guastalla, and intimated to Ferdinando Carlo the orders of the Courts of Vienna and Spain that his fortifications be destroyed without delay. The Mantuan Duke tried to gain time with protests, but this was not allowed him; and finding Guastalla surrounded by troops, he had to give in, and see the fortifications destroyed, which had cost him 40,000 scudi provided by France. Fuensalida even threw down (1690) the Rocca, the ancient Citadel which had existed for centuries, despite the Duke’s—in this case—just remonstrances; and it was then that the latter engaged the French engineer Du Plessis to plan out the defences of Mantua, making trenches outside Porta Pusterla, and for Porta S. Giorgio a wooden drawbridge, which could be destroyed in case of attack.

Meanwhile the Cæsarean Envoy, Marchese degli Obizzi, had come to Mantua to treat of the dispute still proceeding between Don Vincenzo Gonzaga and his cousin the Duke of Mantua; when suddenly, in January of 1691, this latter’s *bête noire*, Fuensalida, appeared with his troops in the Mantovano, without explaining his intentions. Ferdinando Carlo took fright, and—with Casale and other matters on his conscience—seems to have completely lost his head at this unlooked-for apparition. He made a bolt for Venice, leaving the govern-

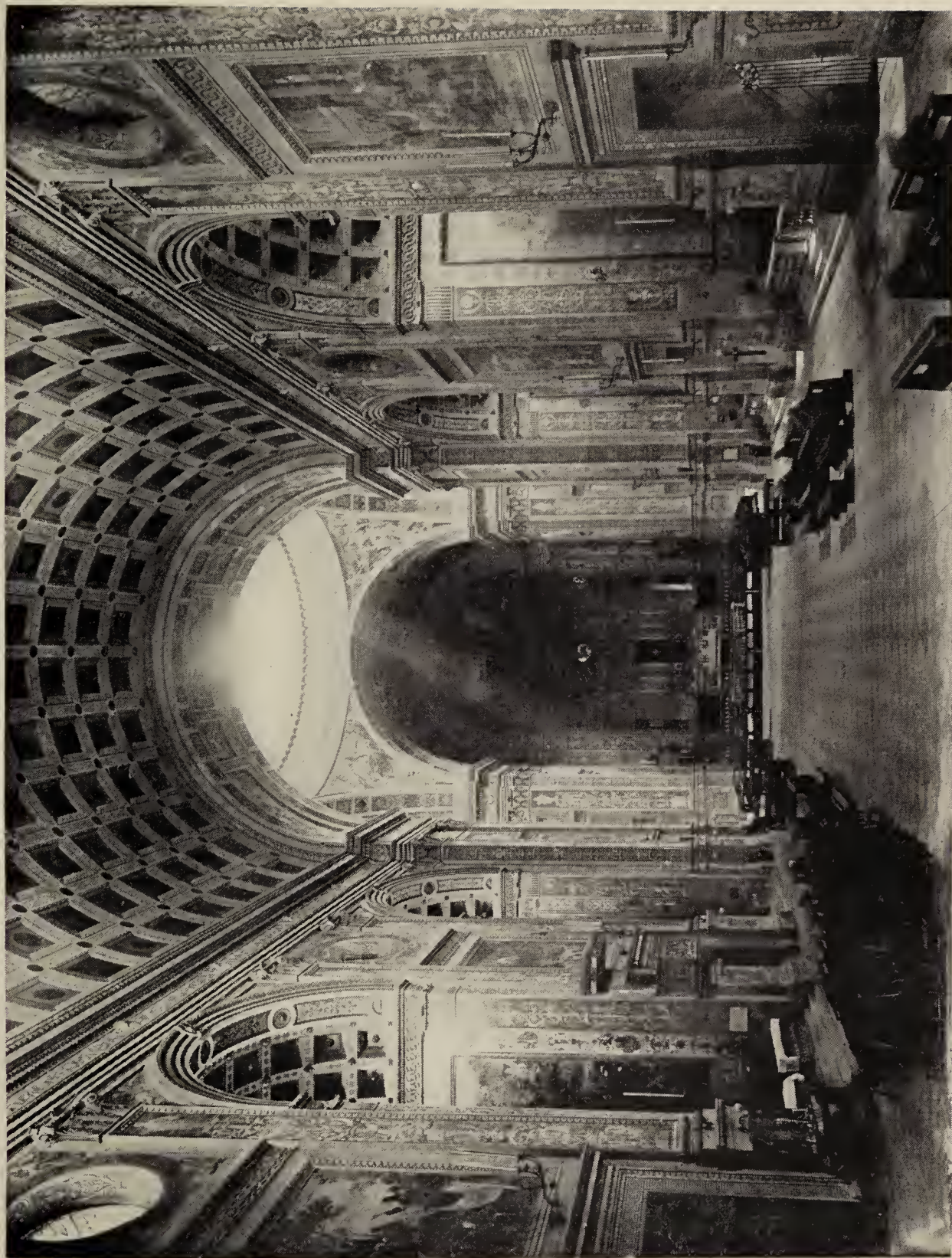
ment to his Duchess and Obizzi, and the city in a state of terror. It was then that the Duchess showed herself a true Princess of Casa Gonzaga. She rode forth on horseback through the city, bringing back confidence to the citizens, who rallied round her. A capitulation was arranged, by which the Spanish troops should retire when they had destroyed the fortifications erected in the year previous upon the Po and Oglio, especially at Gazzuolo ; and the Duke felt it safe to come back from his harbour of refuge.

But with this very year things had come to a head at Castiglione del Stiviere. The inhabitants, driven to despair by the tyranny and extortions of their Gonzaga ruler, rose in revolt, set free the prisoners, and on December 23rd surrounded the Palace, with the intention of getting both Don Ferdinando and his brother Francesco into their hands ; but the latter escaped, and rode for his life towards Brescia, while the Prince with his family took refuge in the Rocca. Their palaces were sacked, and their infuriated subjects were preparing, at the end of January 1692, to assault the Rocca and capture the tyrant when the Imperial Commissary, Count Borromeo, arrived on the scene and occupied Castiglione with his Spanish troops. Prince Ferdinando was allowed to leave under safe conduct, and carried to Spain, where he remained, maintained by the Court during the hearing of his claim to be reinstated—a suit which dragged on without ever reaching a conclusion. Such, says the chronicler, was the miserable end of the Gonzaga Lords of Castiglione ; an end brought about by the tyranny of Prince Ferdinando and the immoralities (*galanterie*) of his wife, of the House of Mirandola. Meanwhile the Courts of Spain and Vienna, unable to tolerate any further the continual bad faith of Duke Ferdinando Carlo, gave (by their diploma of May 4, 1692) to his cousin, Don Vincenzo, Guastalla itself, with the much disputed lands of Luzzara and Reggiolo ; on news of this the Mantuan Duke fell into one of his wonted passions, published long printed protests, and sent a special envoy to Vienna. But he got no hearing ; and Don Vincenzo Gonzaga obtained his investiture on August 19, 1693, and set to work to fortify Guastalla under the protection of Spain.

Then came, in the year following, the thunderbolt of

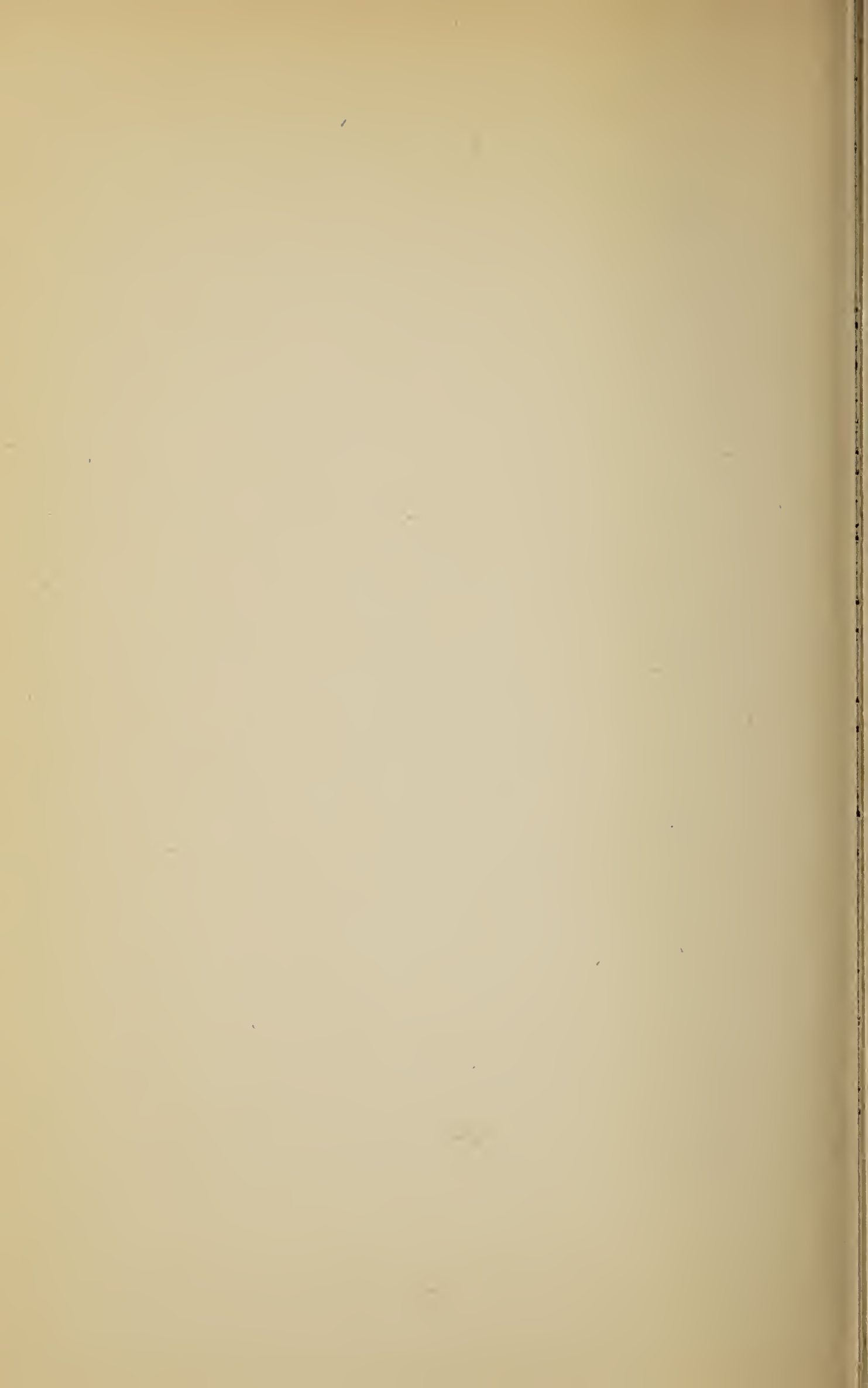
European war ; long threatening, as in our own time, the storm broke suddenly, and drew all nations around into its magnetic current. Austria, Spain and Savoy now stood together, to break the world-power of Louis XIV of France and to drive him from Italy, where he was becoming firmly established. The Duke of Mantua, from his past record, was suspect to the Allies, whose first move was to send (November 11, 1694) their envoy, Count Castelbarco, to remain in Mantua and watch his conduct ; at the same time distributing their troops in the Mantovano, and requesting the dismissal of the envoy of the Most Christian King. In the summer following, Casale, always a storm-centre, was besieged by the Allies, and its French commandant surrendered on August 11, 1696, making the condition that the Citadel and Castello should be dismantled and the city handed back to Duke Ferdinando Carlo ; but next year Savoy withdrew from the alliance, and France, having her eyes upon the Spanish succession, was quite willing to accept (October 7, 1697) a convention by which both sides should withdraw from Italy. There followed a brief and happy interlude of peace, which the Mantuan Duke, with his subjects' willing aid, seems to have devoted to completing the great Basilica of S. Andrea, to which the roof of the choir and transepts was yet wanting. This great work had been set in hand "with fervour of spirit" in the spring of 1697 ; and the relics of the Most Precious Blood there enshrined on this occasion were exposed to the people.

It was that eternal question of Guastalla which now again started fresh mischief. Ever since the decision against him in 1692, Duke Ferdinando Carlo had been protesting and complaining ; and Don Vincenzo Gonzaga now put in a counter claim, on his side, against his Ducal cousin for the revenues from 1678 to 1692, when that State had come back into his possession. The matter came before the Aulic Council of the Empire, and this Supreme Court decided (1699) against the Duke, confirming Don Vincenzo in his possession and admitting the claim for back revenues. Vain were the Ducal protests, and the poor Duchess was so worried by this whole matter that her health became affected ; while the Duke himself, raging inwardly, looked around for some opportunity of revenge—



INTERIOR OF BASILICA OF S. ANDREA AT MANTUA

DESIGNED BY LEO BATTISTA ALBERTI COMPLETED BY VIANI AND JUVARA



and found it only too ready to his hand. He had already sent his envoy to Paris to arrange the affairs of Charleville, almost the last Lordship in France remaining to the Gonzaga, when the death of Charles II, in the first year of the new century (1700), and the succession of the Duc d'Anjou, as Philip V, to the throne of Spain, set into a blaze the smouldering embers of European war. The King of France—fully prepared for this event, which made the Duc d'Anjou ruler of Spain, Flanders, Naples and Sicily—had powerful armies ready to support him. He had gained over to his side, by promises and caresses, the Duke of Savoy ; and, though Venice declined his advances, and decided to remain neutral, the House of Bourbon now threatened to become master of Europe. Even in this critical moment Duke Ferdinando Carlo would not forego any of his wonted pleasures, and had gone to Venice to the Carnival of 1701 ; but in that city had more than one meeting with a Cardinal, who was there as envoy of France. He may have even wished to remain neutral in the approaching struggle, but was too far committed to keep himself free ; on the other hand, when he returned to Mantua at the end of February (1701), he found strong opposition from his own Ministers to the idea of receiving a French garrison. Irresolute and hesitating, he turned for help to Rome.

But it was too late : for the “ Galli-Spani ” (the French and Spanish troops) were already in the Mantovano, and the decision was taken out of his hands. On April 11 the gates of Mantua were opened, and eight thousand of them poured in to occupy the Citadel and strong places of Mantua, while others had occupied Castiglione del Stiviere and Goito. The Imperial Envoy, Castelbarco, returned to Vienna, where the Emperor—furious at what he considered as the Duke's complicity—released the Mantuans from their allegiance to the House of Gonzaga. The Imperial armies, under Prince Eugène, descended on the Mantovano, levying heavy contributions, and seizing Castiglione and Castelfreddo ; while at Mantua all was want and confusion. Just what Isabella d'Este, by her wise diplomacy, managed to avoid had now come about by the folly and weakness of her last descendant. The great Powers of Europe, the Empire and France, were engaged in a

life-and-death struggle, with the Mantovano as their cock-pit—the battleground of the contending armies.

It would be impossible for me here to follow in detail the issues of this great war, which swayed back and forwards with varying fortunes. In January of 1702 the Imperialists had Mantua closely besieged, and in mid-winter Prince Eugène made a surprise attack on Cremona, and captured the Duc de Villeroy, Marshal of France. But fresh troops came out from France under the Duc de Vendôme, so that the “Galli-Spani” numbered fifty thousand, with the King of Spain himself in their army. In a great battle at Luzzara, which lasted all the day of August 15, 1702, outnumbering the Imperialists by more than two to one, they drove back Prince Eugène, entered Luzzara, Guastalla—which they gave back to the Duke of Mantua—then Borgoforte and Governolo. Prince Eugène returned to Vienna to beg for reinforcements, leaving his lieutenants in command. A new Imperial army was descending on Italy, when news came that the Duke of Savoy had abandoned the Franco-Spanish alliance, and had come over to the Emperor’s side.

We have seen how the Guastalla quarrel—in which her brother-in-law and her only sister were involved—had affected the health of Duchess Anna Isabella. From January of 1703 she had been failing; she made some recovery in September, but on November 14th she died, “in the fresh age of forty-eight years,” and was buried beside her mother, the Duchess of Guastalla. She may surely take her place among the great princesses of Casa Gonzaga—beside the Princess Maria and the Archduchess Isabella, if not Isabella d’Este herself. For, if her piety, her charity and religion, and the patient resignation with which she supported the dissolute life of her husband, are justly praised by the chronicler, we have seen too how she had come forth, in a crisis of Mantuan story, to give back courage and security to her subjects. When she died the Duke was at Casale, and did not even return to Mantua after her death; but sent instead a dispatch, opened in the presence of the Mantuan Magistrates, appointing a Council of Regency. In this Council it was noticed that none of the Gonzaga family were included, though several illustrious members were then

alive ; and this “ because the Duke was given over to the party of France, against the judgment of his Court and members of his own family.”

It may be questioned from his conduct whether Duke Ferdinando Carlo had felt very deeply the loss of his wife ; his thoughts, we are told, were of love and ambition ; and now, finding himself free, he formed the plan of a great political marriage within the Royal House of France, and decided on a visit to Paris. He carried this out in the semi-royal style of his earlier visit to the seat of war in Hungary—in the manner so dear to his own heart, and, we may guess, to the pockets of his unlucky subjects. On March 8, 1704, he started from Casale with a cavalcade of Ministers, knights, horses and furniture, and after a few days at Charleville, reached Paris on the 9th of May. Lodged by Louis XIV in the Palais du Luxembourg, he was received by the “ Roi Soleil ” in special audience at Versailles three days later ; and, after discussing very fully the affairs of Italy, spent some months between Paris and Versailles, looking round at the same time for a lady suitable to share his Ducal throne. His choice fell finally upon Suzanne Henriette de Lorraine ; and, presented by the King with a rich sword and the title of his Generalissimo in Italy, he returned to Casale on October 28, 1704, very pleased and even vainglorious over the success of his journey. Fortune seemed indeed at this moment to smile upon Duke Ferdinando Carlo. He had recovered Casale and the much-disputed Guastalla ; had lodged with the French King his further claims to Sabbioneta, Bozzolo, and Viadana ; and was now about to marry again into one of the greatest houses of aristocratic France.

But Fortune is known to be a fickle goddess—some have even said a fickle jade. Suzanne de Lorraine had come by sea to Genoa, being nearly captured on the way by two English ships which had given chase ; for now that “ termagant of the seas ” had come into the great war, and its whole aspect began before long to change. It has never been the policy of England, free from the continent of Europe and yet bound to it in many ways, to let any one Power become its complete master. The weak rule of the Stuarts, which divided the

nation—and made Charles II even the pensioner of France—had given place to that of William III, who had consistently opposed the ambitious designs of France ; and soon after his death Queen Anne (1702) notified her Allies abroad of her intention to pursue the foreign policy of the late King. The combined English and Dutch fleets captured the Spanish treasure galleons at Vigo ; and at Blenheim (August 13, 1704) our English troops, under Marlborough, fought beside those of Prince Eugène against the French, and gained a brilliant victory. In November of that year the Duke of Mantua's marriage at Tortona had been followed by his triumphal entry into Casale with his bride, and celebrations in Mantua and Monferrato ; and in the January following (1705) he returned, after an absence of two years, to Mantua, and abolished the Regency, making three Councils of State, Justice, and Finance. It was not till the next year that his new Duchess made her State entry (1706) into Mantua, the special envoy of Louis XIV being present at the celebrations ; and Duke Ferdinando Carlo commissioned the famous theatre architect, Bibbiena, to construct for him a sumptuous theatre near the Castello.¹

This commission was not destined for many years to see completion ; for now the political barometer was rapidly changing, and we might even say—pursuing our metaphor—in the case of the Mantuan Duke was going down with a run. To follow this further, we must return to the seat of war. Prince Eugène was now (1706) on his way to Italy with a fresh army ; but before he could arrive the Duc de Vendôme had defeated his lieutenant, General Reventlau. Perhaps the title of “Generalissimo,” received at Paris, may have given Duke Ferdinando Carlo an exaggerated opinion of his place in the direction of the war : in any case, he had a serious quarrel with the Duc de Vendôme, complained to Paris, and got him recalled from Italy. Vendôme was an experienced commander ; and the Prince d'Orléans—now sent out in his place by Louis XIV—a prince of the blood royal, standing very near the throne. Our own military experience has shown that

¹ Ferdinando and Francesco Bibbiena were at this time the most famed theatre architects in Italy, and even beyond the Alps. *Vide* Corrado Ricci, *I Bibbiena, Architetti Teatrali, 1625-1780*, Milan, 1915.

it is not always easy to combine the two above qualifications in one and the same person. Vendôme's presence was badly needed by France on her eastern front ; but, before he could arrive, the allied armies, under our Duke of Marlborough, in the great battle of Ramillies (May 23, 1706) had driven the French from the field, inflicting heavy losses. In the campaign which followed, when Orléans came to face Prince Eugène, he received under the walls of Turin a crushing defeat from the Austrian leader ; and was himself badly wounded, while his army, seized with panic, fled to the Alps. Then, turning round, Prince Eugène took Casale after fifteen days' siege, with its garrison. All the Lombard cities now submitted to the victor. In the Mantovano the " Galli-Spani " had to abandon Guastalla and Borgoforte, and what was left of them retired on Mantua, which trembled at the prospect of another siege : but peace was already approaching.

For Italy was lost to France ; and Louis XIV, who had spent immense sums on the war on that side, had no intention of continuing it for the sake of his Mantuan protégé. Early in 1707 an agreement was arranged, and concluded on March 13 of that year at Milan, in which Duke Ferdinando Carlo found himself entirely sacrificed. In vain did he send a special envoy to his patron Louis XIV to implore his protection. That monarch thought first of his own interests and those of his country. Prince Eugène and the Imperial Court on the subject of the Mantuan Duke were immovable : the man, they said, was a traitor, a felon (*fellone*), deprived of every right. Monferrato went to the Duke of Savoy ; the Duchies of Milan and Mantua to the Empire ; and France abandoned every claim on Italy.

Duke Ferdinando Carlo, who had, as usual, sought safety in Venice, was beside himself with rage when he heard these terms ; and, though the French envoy tried to calm him, by the promise of an annual pension of 40,000 francs from his King, it was of no avail. He fell into one of his passions (*furie*), cursed France and Spain, with those who had led him to follow them, and then became seized with the profoundest melancholy. His French wife came next into his thoughts, and he wrote begging her to join him at Venice ; but hers

was a fine-weather alliance, and she preferred to return to Lorraine, where she died a few years later. Nor did he get much sympathy from his own Mantuan subjects, who saw now only too clearly the abyss into which his conduct had been leading them ; and, with memories of the former siege in their minds, lost no time in sending a deputation to Prince Eugène, begging his protection for their goods and persons, and his advice as to the furniture of the Ducal palace, which Ferdinando Carlo claimed as his own.¹ On April 2, 1707, the Austrians entered Mantua, and took over the city. Solemn Mass was held, a Council of the Provinces formed, and the Landgraf of Darmstadt returned to Vienna to make his report ; while Don Vincenzo Gonzaga was at last able to come back in full security to his Duchy of Guastalla.

There can be little doubt that, had he so wished, Don Vincenzo at this moment might have received from the Emperor the now vacant Dukedom of Mantua ; for it had been already decreed by the Cæsarean Court to treat Duke Ferdinando Carlo as a felon, while his followers were warned at once to return to their own country. One cannot help feeling that, had that Dukedom been given after the siege and sack of Mantua to the House of Guastalla, always loyal to the Empire—instead of that of Nevers, who had already proved false—much of the subsequent trouble might have been spared ; but what not improbably prevented this was that in this case Monferrato, through the marriage with Princess Maria, must have remained with the Nevers family. Now Don Vincenzo had returned home at last to Guastalla, after years of exile and struggle—a man weary and sad, for he had lost his wife, Maria Vittoria, in this very time. He perhaps had no mind to begin then a life of new and great responsibilities ; but there was, without any doubt, a yet stronger reason. Austria had now gained a secure hold on Northern Italy, with the two Duchies of Milan and Mantua firmly in her grasp ; while Mantua itself was the key of her military position. The

¹ Duke Ferdinando Carlo had brought with him to Venice the pick of what was left in his gallery—282 works “ of good hand and good painters,” 680 others “ not so good,” and “ all the furniture of the Corte of His Serene Highness of Mantua, sent by his orders to Venice in the year 1707.” *Vide* Luzio, *La Galleria dei Gonzaga*, ch. iii., “ Archivio Gonzaga.”

Duke of Mantua must have been henceforth a mere puppet in her hands ; a great historic name, the name of Gonzaga, but nothing more—" *nomen et præterea nihil.*" We may regret that this great name should have disappeared from the world's history ; but for Don Vincenzo Gonzaga, a man—the very antithesis of his cousin—severe, upright, simple in his tastes, and intolerant of such political bondage, we can only feel respect and sympathy.

Upon that cousin the sentence of "Bando Imperiale," depriving him of the Dukedom and all his rights, had been now decreed by the Emperor, but was not published in Mantua until July 23, 1708 ; and before this the unhappy Duke had already ceased to live. He had betaken himself to Padua to escape from the profound depression which had seized him, and in June fell ill with a chest attack ; and there, at the age of fifty-six years, died, on July 5, " detesting his errors of the past, and recommending to the Senate of Venice his natural children, Giovanni, Carlo, and Isabella." The lawsuit, carried before that Senate with regard to the valuable furniture from his palace, was decided in favour of the Duke of Lorraine, grandson of the Empress Eleonora Gonzaga, who was charged with paying the debts of the deceased and with making provision for his natural children ; ¹ and all his landed property went to his cousin and lifelong opponent, the Duke of Guastalla.

Thus had ended the second line of the Gonzaga, Lords of Mantua. Even before this, on February 29, 1708, the Austrian Emperor, represented by Baron Taunath and Königsegg, as his civil and military Governors, had received, in the great Sala di Troia of the Reggia, their oath of allegiance from the deputies of the Commune of Mantua. Then came the firing of guns, the "Te Deum" in the Cathedral ; the arms of the House of Gonzaga were torn down from all public places ; and Mantua became a provincial city under Austrian rule, and as such remained—with the interlude of Napoleonic wars—until the awakening of the new spirit of Italian Unity.

In that new Italy Mantua claims her place—a gleaming jewel in the crown of cities of ancient fame—from her great

¹ Dr. Luzio (*op. cit.* ch. iii.) alludes to a round dozen (*serqua*) of these, including three nuns.

military position and political importance, her commerce and agriculture, the treasures of past art in her churches and palaces, which are now being put in order. When she takes her place—as she will without question—among the great art centres of Italy; when her Reggia becomes a Museum of European fame, which the visitor from the north or from across the Atlantic will mark down as indispensable to his itinerary; when her arcaded streets become crowded with motor-cars, and the inevitable Palace Hotel shall have invaded the old Borgo di S. Giorgio—the change may bring a pang of regret to some of us. We may think then how, in past days, we had dined off sturgeon from the Po and *vino Mantovano* at pre-war prices; had picked up “incunabula” from her book-stalls at figures which would make Bond Street shudder; had loitered away summer afternoons in the gardens of the Te; across her lakes have seen Mantua with her towers and cupolas, a magic city, fade into the sunset, or watched the moon rise behind the shadowy Reggia from beneath the blossoming lime trees.

Yet the world must move forward; and our regrets give way to the larger vision of this new Italy, claiming by patriotism, labour, discipline and sacrifice the great place which surely waits her among the Powers of the Future. That upward path may bring its moments of difficulty, dissension, discouragement: but there is no other road which can lead to a nation's greatness.

TOMASINA,
m. Guglielmo di Castelbarco

LISINA,
m. Niccolò Fieschi

ERITA,
440,
quis of Ferrara

1469

CECILIA,
b. 1451

BARBARA,
b. 1455 ; d. 1503 ;
m. Duke of Wurtemberg

PAOLA,
m. Conte di Gorizia

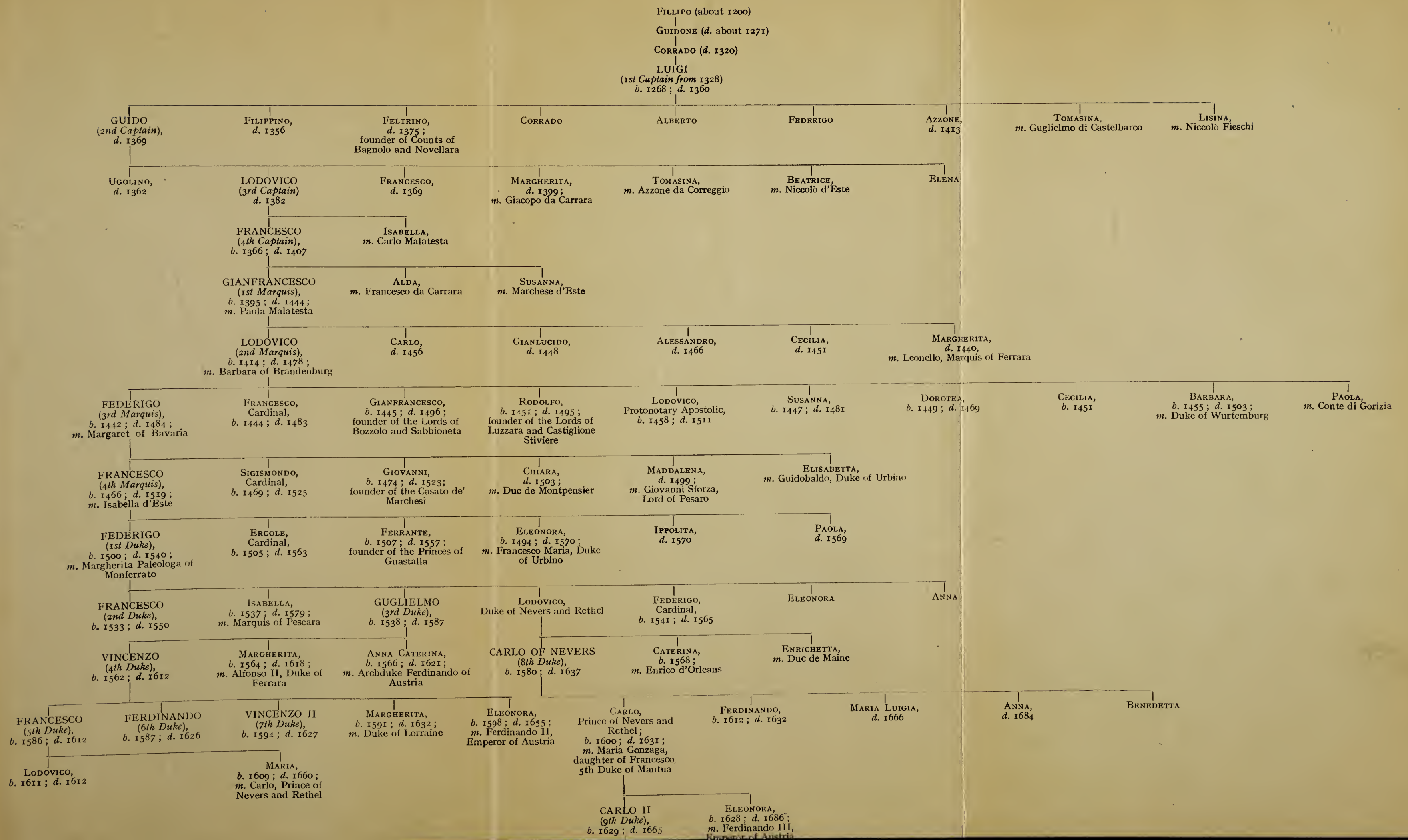
ANNA,
d. 1684

BENEDETTA

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